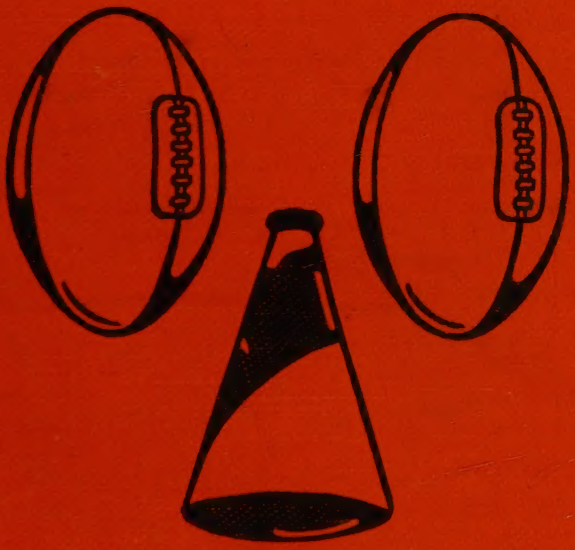
# RIGHT END EMERSON



RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

1922
1st Ed.

#54

RIGHT END EMERSON

THE FOOTBALL ELEVEN BOOKS

BY

RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

LEFT END EDWARDS
LEFT TACKLE THAYER
LEFT GUARD GILBERT
CENTER RUSH ROWLAND
FULL-BACK FOSTER
QUARTER-BACK BATES
LEFT HALF HARMON
RIGHT END EMERSON

Now he was blocked, now he had broken free again!

*Page* 270

# Right End Emerson

BY

RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

AUTHOR OF

LEFT END EDWARDS,
LEFT TACKLE THAYER,
FULL-BACK FOSTER, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

LESLIE CRUMP

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RIGHT END EMERSON

# RIGHT END EMERSON

## CHAPTER I

### A TIP TO THE WAITER

A VERY gaudy red automobile whirled up the circling drive that led to the white-pillared portico of the big hotel at Pine Harbor, announced its approach with a wheezy groan of the horn and came to a sudden stop before the steps, a stop so disconcerting to the extreme right-hand occupant of the single seat that he narrowly escaped a head-on collision with the wind-shield. Taking advantage of the impetus that had unseated him, he flung his legs over the door and alighted on the well-kept gravel.

"This car may be sort of cranky when it comes to *going,* Mac," he said, "but she sure can *stop!*"

"Well, she got you here," chuckled Harley McLeod. "Give the kid a hand with the suit-cases, Jimmy. Pile out, Stan, and I'll take Matilda around to the garage and give her some oats. You fellows register, and tell the guy at the desk that we want one room and no bath; tell him we had a bath last week. Don't let him soak you, either. We've got four more days of this foreign

travel before we get home, and the old sock's mighty near empty. Something about twelve dollars for the crowd will be pretty near right."

"Fine," agreed the third member of the trio, sarcastically, viewing as he spoke the long front of the building and its general air of hauteur and expensiveness. "Twelve dollars apiece is likely to be closer to it. If you want economy, Mac, why the dickens do you pick out the swellest joints on the route?"

"Well," answered McLeod, glancing rearward to see if the suit-cases had been wrested from their place, "we don't seem to have much luck that way, and that's a fact. Gee, that place last night pretty nigh ruined me! You do your best, anyway. All clear, Jimmy? Let go their heads! Back in a minute!" The small red car leaped forward impetuously, dashed down the drive to the road, swerved precipitately to the right and was lost to sight—if not to hearing—beyond a hedge. Stanley Hassell joined Jimmy Austen and together they followed a small uniformed youth, laden with three suit-cases, up the steps, across the wide porch and into the hotel.

It was Stanley who took the pen from the politely extended hand of the clerk and inscribed the names of his party on the register. After each name he added "N. Y. City." This was less truthful than convenient, for although he and Harley McLeod lived in widely separate sections of that

far-stretching metropolis, Jimmy hailed from Elizabeth, New Jersey. But, as Stanley had explained soon after the beginning of their two-weeks tour in Mac's disguised flivver, "Elizabeth, N. J." was too long to write. Besides, he added, it wouldn't be long before Elizabeth became a part of New York, anyway, and there was no harm in anticipating.

"We'd like a room for three," announced Stanley when he had put down the last dot. "With single beds, if possible, and without a bath. As reasonable a room as you have, please."

The clerk, a carefully attired gentleman, frowned hopelessly. "I'm afraid we haven't a room with three single beds," he said, as he consulted a book. "I can give you a nice large room on the front of the house, however. That has a double bed in it, and I can have a cot put in also. I'm afraid that's the best—"

"What's the price of it?" interrupted Stanley anxiously.

"How long are you staying?"

"Just overnight."

"Eight dollars, in that case."

"For the bunch?" inquired Jimmy eagerly.

The clerk shook his head and smiled again, this time commiseratingly. "Eight dollars a day apiece," he said in his nicely modulated tones. "Our regular price, gentlemen."

It was Stanley's turn to do a little head-shak-

ing. "Look here," he confided earnestly, "you've got us wrong. We weren't thinking of *buying* the room; we just want to *rent* it. Now, what about a room on the *back* of the house? Something about fifteen dollars for the three of us? We aren't crazy about the view, anyway; besides, we couldn't see much at night, could we? You just take another peep into the old book there and talk reasonable!"

The gentleman seemed inclined to be haughty for a moment, but Stanley's smile was captivating and he went back to the book good-naturedly enough. "There's a room on the third floor," he announced at last. "It's rather small, but perhaps it will do. The rate is sixteen-fifty."

Stanley mused a moment, mentally dividing sixteen dollars and fifty cents by three, and then nodded. "All right," he agreed. "Guess that'll have to do."

"Front! Show the gentlemen to 87!"

"Say," broke in Jimmy with very evident anxiety, "that includes meals, doesn't it?"

This time the clerk smiled quite humanly. "Certainly," he replied. "We are on the American Plan."

"Idiot!" breathed Stanley as they turned away.

"That's all right," replied Jimmy doggedly. "It's just as well to be sure. Look at the time they held us up for seven dollars apiece and then we found we had to pay extra to eat!"

"That was in a city, you chump," reminded Stanley. They bade the boy with the luggage wait a minute, but Harley McLeod came hurrying in just then and they began the ascent of the stairs. Harley showed a wrathful countenance.

"Those robbers want three dollars for the car!" he sputtered.

"Three dollars for the car?" echoed Jimmy. "Let 'em have it, I say. It's worth five, maybe, but three dollars is three dollars, and the room's costing us sixteen-fifty—"

"*What!*" exclaimed Harley, standing stock-still on the landing. "Sixteen *dollars?*"

"And fifty cents," confirmed Jimmy cheerfully. "The fifty cents is for the food."

Harley McLeod stared darkly at Stanley. "You're a swell little bargainer, you are! Why, that's five and a half apiece!"

"Well, what of it?" asked Stanley huffily. "We had to pay six and a half last night, didn't we? Say, if you don't like the way I do it, why don't you do it yourself? If you think you can get better terms—"

"That includes the meals, Mac," interrupted Jimmy soothingly. "I asked the Duke of Argyle, and he said so."

"Oh, shut up," begged Harley. "Gosh, these summer hotels are regular robber dens! All right, I've still got a few sous left, and when I'm broke

I'll borrow from Jimmy. Say, where is this room? On the roof?"

"Third floor, sir," answered the bell-boy. "Nice and cool up here."

"Ought to be if altitude has anything to do with temperature," agreed Harley with sarcasm. "What time's dinner, son?"

"Seven, sir, and runs to eight-thirty."

"And it's only a bit after five," groaned Jimmy. "I'll tell you one thing, fellows, right now, and that's this: When the Earl of Buckminster down there charged me five-fifty he committed a fatal error. If I don't eat five-fifty worth of food at dinner to-night you fellows can throw me in the ocean!"

"Not so horrid," commented Stanley as they strode after the boy into the apartment. "Small, but sufficient, eh?"

"Do they think we're going to sleep three in a bed?" demanded Harley, aghast.

"They're going to put in a cot for you," said Jimmy comfortingly.

"For me?" Harley viewed him coldly. "How do you attain that condition, Jimmy? What's the matter with your sleeping on the cot?"

Jimmy shook his head. "I don't rest well on the things," he answered. "Maybe Stan had better—"

"We'll draw lots," said Stanley. He tossed a dime to the grinning bell-boy and then pulled three

strands from the tattered fringe of the straw matting rug. "Short piece gets the cot. Help yourself, Mac."

Stanley himself fell heir to the shortest straw and good-naturedly accepted his fate. "I'm the smallest, anyway," he said. "Let's wash up and look the place over. Any one for a swim?"

"I'd like a swim," said Jimmy, "but it always gives me a fierce appetite, and I'm hungry enough right now to chew nails! Let's sit on the porch and look wealthy. You don't get so hungry if you sit still."

Some two hours later the three boys were conducted across a large dining-room by an awe-inspiring head-waiter and seated at a table set for four. Jimmy looked approvingly at the crowded menu and passed it across to Harley. "Let's not be choosey," he suggested. "Let's start right at the top and take things as they come."

"Well, we can't eat three kinds of soup," said Harley.

"I could," Jimmy replied. "But I'm going to have some clams first. Which soup is the fillingest?"

A boy of about their own age, which is to say seventeen or eighteen, began pouring water into the glasses, which led Jimmy to observe for the first time that the waiters were all masculine and youthful, though most of them were older than their own attendant. Just then Harley's foot col-

lided painfully with Jimmy's ankle and the latter emitted a loud howl of anguish that attracted the disapproving curiosity of the neighboring diners.

"Shut up, you idiot!" whispered Stanley severely.

"That's all right," returned Jimmy aggrievedly, rubbing the injured ankle under the table, "but he pretty near killed me with that big hoof of his! Gee, Mac, what's the prodigious conception?"

"Sorry," muttered Harley, his eyes on the menu. "Do we all want clams? All right, clams for three, then." This latter to the waiter at his elbow.

"Will you order your soup and fish now, please?" asked the waiter. "It saves time."

"Sure. Let's see. I'll have the cream of celery. What's yours, Stan?"

"Same, I guess."

"Oxen tails for me," said Jimmy. "And a large portion of that bluing fish."

The waiter took himself off and Harley leaned toward Jimmy with a scowl. "Didn't you see who that was, you dumb-bell?"

"See who what was?" asked Jimmy, glancing around blankly.

"The waiter, of course."

"No, who was he? Charlie Chaplin?"

"Emerson, one of our fellows. You know him. A junior, I think."

Jimmy shook his head. "I don't know any Emerson, Mac. You mean the chap that's waiting on us is an Alton fellow?"

"Sure! What did you think I kicked you for?"

"I thought you just wanted to show your love for me. What's he doing here?"

"Waiting on table," replied Stanley. "Haven't you any eyes?"

"Yes, but I mean— Well, it seems a funny thing for an Alton fellow, doesn't it?"

"Guess all these waiters are students," returned Stanley. "College men, a lot of them. I suppose Emerson needs the money."

"Well, yes, he would," agreed Jimmy readily, "if he's staying at this joint. I must have a look at him. I dare say I know him by sight. What's he do?"

Harley shrugged. "Nothing much, I guess. Seems to me, though, he was playing on the second team last fall."

"Football?"

Harley nodded, and Stanley confirmed him. "Yes, he's been on the second a couple of years. You'll remember him when you see him, Jimmy, for you must have played with him year before last."

"Well, if he isn't any faster on the field than he is here," Jimmy grumbled, "it's no wonder he's never made the first. Do you fellows know him? I didn't notice any warm hand-clasps!"

"Oh, I know him to nod to," replied Harley, "but you don't exactly expect to find your school fellows waiting on table in a public hotel. I dare say he doesn't want to be recognized. Anyway, he didn't speak to me."

"Suppose he thought it was up to you to signal first," said Jimmy. "After all, Mac, waiting in a summer hotel isn't much different from waiting at college, and lots of corking chaps have done that. Here he is now, I guess. Making good time through a broken field, too! Just missed a tackle then! If that other fellow had got him it would have been good-by, clams! Yes, I've seen him lots of times, but I never knew his name."

While the waiter placed the orders on the table Jimmy observed him. He was a well-made boy, slim yet muscular, a fact not entirely hidden by the ill-fitting waiter's jacket that he wore. He had brown eyes, rather quiet seeming eyes, and brown hair that was very carefully brushed away from his forehead, and a fairly short nose. On the whole, Jimmy decided, Emerson, so far as his appearance went, was a credit to Alton Academy. That he had recognized the trio was very evident to the observer, and that he had no intention of making use of his slight acquaintance with Harley was equally evident. He spoke only when addressed and then carefully avoided the speaker's eyes. Jimmy didn't know whether Emerson felt any embarrassment, but he somehow wished that

the impressive head waiter had seated them elsewhere. It was rather jarring to be served in this fashion by a chap you were likely to meet on the Green a week or so hence!

But Jimmy soon forgot that, for he was extremely hungry, the food was excellent, the waiter, in spite of having two other tables to serve, attended to their wants in quite professional fashion and the dinner passed off pleasantly and expeditiously. Toward the last of it Stanley presented a problem to them. "Say, fellows, how about tips?" he asked.

Harley frowned. "I was wondering," he said. "Of course these fellows must take tips. I'll bet the hotel doesn't pay them much. But, just the same, it sort of goes against the grain, Stan."

"Leave it till morning," advised Jimmy. "Then we can slip a dollar under a plate when he isn't looking."

"A dollar!" ejaculated Harley. "Listen to the millionaire! It's always been fifty cents for the bunch so far."

"Oh, well, this is different," replied Jimmy. "This guy's one of us, you see. You can't be a piker with one of your own School!"

And so the matter was left, and they moved from the dining-room rather ponderously and sighingly seated themselves in three rocking chairs on the broad veranda and, almost in silence, watched a huge orange-colored moon arise

beyond the rim of the quiet ocean. The longest speech of the ensuing quarter of an hour was made by Jimmy. "Allowing fifty cents for breakfast and a dollar for my third of the bed to-night, I figure that I'll be just twenty-five cents ahead of the house when we go our way!"

Later, having decided to play some pool as an aid to digestion, Jimmy paused as they passed through the lobby and fixed what he afterwards explained was an expression of triumphant gloat on the clerk behind the desk. This expression he continued until the clerk, happening to glance toward him, returned his look with one of mingled surprise and concern. Thereupon Jimmy ceased gloating and hurried after the others, who, meanwhile, had reached the billiard room just in time to secure the last pool table ahead of two disgruntled elderly plutocrats in dinner-jackets. These latter gentlemen, grumbling their displeasure, seated themselves, behind large and expensive cigars, on a leathern divan and watched the play of the trio with basilisk stares that interfered seriously with Stanley's game. Harley and Jimmy refused to be intimidated, but after five games, all won by Harley, they acknowledged defeat and yielded the table to the besiegers. However, it was just on nine o'clock then, and, as Stanley wisely observed, they were paying good money for that room and so might as well make use of it. At ten they were fast asleep, as was befitting

those who had traveled one hundred and eight miles since morning in Matilda!

Yet it was well after nine o'clock the next day when they descended for breakfast. They were unanimous in declaring regretfully that they were not really hungry, but they managed to do fairly well with cereal, eggs, steak, hot biscuits and coffee. Their waiter again attended to them in a manner that was beyond criticism, and Jimmy acknowledged a warm admiration for his skill and dexterity. "Some garsong, if you ask me," said Jimmy. "Has everything under perfect control and hasn't dropped a plate yet!"

"I feel a bit mean about not speaking to him," said Stanley. "After all, he's one of us, and we know it, and he knows we know it, and—"

"Yes, and he doesn't want us to do anything of the sort," interrupted Jimmy. "The chap's incog. Let us—let us respect his wishes, eh?"

Harley looked relieved. "Jimmy's right, I think. Besides, it isn't as if we were personal friends. We only know him by sight, as you might say. Who's got a dollar?"

Jimmy produced a crumpled bill with less hesitation than usual and curled it cunningly under his plate. Then they departed hurriedly before the waiter returned. Half an hour later Matilda jumped away on the next lap of her journey, honking asthmatically as she disappeared from sight.

Russell Emerson, clearing the dishes from the

table lately occupied by his school-mates, discovered the crumpled dollar bill and frowned at it. Then the frown vanished and he shrugged his shoulders and slipped the money philosophically into his pocket.

## CHAPTER II

### PARTNERS CONFER

Alton Academy commenced its Fall Term on September 24th that year, and on the afternoon of the nineteenth Russell Emerson dropped from the train at Alton Station, a battered valise in hand, and, disregarding the cordial invitations of carriage and taxi drivers, set forth on foot. It appears to be a New England custom to locate the railroad station as far as possible from the center of the town, and Alton had made no departure from custom. A good half-mile intervened between station and business center, and a second half-mile between the heart of the town and Alton Academy. There had been a time when Alton and Alton Station had been two quite distinct settlements, but now the town had followed the route of the trolley and the two were slenderly connected by a line of small dwellings, small shops and, occasionally, a small factory. Russell followed the trolley tracks and, although presently a car came rattling and whisking toward him from the direction of the station, continued on foot, the valise growing heavier as the stores became more important and more prosperous in appearance. But the boy rested frequently, always before one of the

little stores, and at such times the valise was set down beside him on the pavement while his gaze roved from door to window and when possible penetrated past the usually unattractive display of goods into the further dim recesses of the building. Oddly, as it would seem, his pauses were longer and his interest greater when the window was empty of goods and a placard announced the premises for rent. Indeed, on three occasions he crossed the street to peer up at and into tenantless stores, and on two occasions he jotted down memoranda on the back of an envelope ere he took up his burden and went on.

Reaching the busier and more populous part of Alton, he turned to the left, past the town's single department store, and halted under a sign which read: "Hartford House—Gentlemen Only—One Flight." Russell pushed open the door and climbed the stairs. The office was at the left of the landing, a clean, sun-filled room through whose broad windows one might look down on the traffic of the street or watch, if one cared to, the casements across the way, beyond which a tailor, a Painless Dentist and a manufacturing jeweler plied their trades. At the desk, presided over by an elderly man with abundant gray whiskers, Russell set his name down in an ink-smeared register, paid the sum of seventy-five cents and was presented with a key.

"Eighteen," said the clerk wheezily. "One flight, turn to the left. Thank you."

Acting as his own bell-boy, Russell took himself and his luggage to the second floor, found the door numbered 18 and took possession of a very small, barely furnished room which had, nevertheless, the merit of cleanliness. He ran the shade up, opened the window and found himself looking down on the roof of the Imperial Steam Laundry, as a bold inscription painted on the corrugated iron roof informed him. Beyond the laundry were the brick backs of several office buildings.

"Not much of a view," murmured Russell tolerantly, "but plenty of air. Now let's see." He stripped off his coat and placed it, with a somewhat yellowed straw hat, on the narrow bed. Then, rolling up his sleeves, he poured water into the chipped basin and washed face and hands. That done, he dried on a wispy towel and opened his valise. From it he extracted a thin bundle of papers held together by an elastic band, placed a chair before the window and seated himself, lodging his feet comfortably on the ledge. For the next ten minutes he was busy looking through the contents of the bundle. That completed, he brought forth a fountain pen from a pocket and began to figure thoughtfully on the back of one of the papers.

"Eighty-eight, sixty in bank," he muttered as

he set down that sum. "Check for one hundred and twenty-five. Fifteen and—" He paused and counted the contents of a small leather purse. "Fifteen and seventy-four. It'll cost me three dollars for my room here for four days and, say, four dollars for meals. That's seven dollars. Then there'll be incidentals. Guess I'll say ten altogether. Ten, seventy-four rather. That leaves five. Now then. Naught, six, eight and one to carry, one—two hundred and eighteen dollars and sixty cents."

He gazed for a long minute at the result of his figuring and finally shook his head. "That isn't nearly enough," he sighed. "Maybe, though, Stick can do better than he thought he could. If he can put in two hundred more I guess we can manage." He looked at his watch. "Ought to be here in an hour. Guess I'll go out and have a look around before he gets here."

He put his coat on again and took his hat and sallied forth, stopping at the office long enough to leave his key and to inform the clerk that he would be back at five o'clock, in case any one should inquire for him. Then for the better part of an hour he roamed the streets in that portion of Alton which lay between the Hartford House and the Academy, specializing on the side streets but not neglecting such important arteries of traffic and avenues of trade as Meadow and West and State streets. He was back at a minute or two

before five and had made himself comfortable in one of the six wooden armchairs that stood empty in a row before the windows when feet echoed on the stairway, the office door was pushed open and a very tall, very thin youth appeared. He carried a suit-case, an overcoat and an umbrella, all of which, perceiving Russell across the room, he dumped on the desk before stepping to meet him.

"Hello, Rus," he greeted. "How long have you been here? Have you got a room? Do I bunk in with you, or—"

"You'll have to get one of your own," replied Russell as they shook hands. "Mine's just a single one. Guess they all are. How are you, Stick? Haven't fattened up much this summer."

"I'm very well, thanks. Wait till I register and we'll go up and have a talk. Got your letter about ten minutes before I left. Thought you were dead or something."

In a room very similar to that assigned to Russell, the two seated themselves, George Patterson on the bed and Russell on the single chair. Stick, as he was called, was a boy of Russell's own age, which was seventeen, but looked fully a year older. He came from St. Albans, Vermont, according to the school catalogue, and the catalogue was quite infallible on such subjects, but before that Stick had lived—in fact had been born—in Toronto, and there was much more of the Canadian

than the Yankee in him. He was extremely tall and extremely thin, with high cheek bones, a good deal of color, very dark brown hair that curled, gray eyes, a generous nose and a rather large mouth. You couldn't call him handsome, but he looked particularly healthy and clean and wholesome. One of the things that Russell liked most about him was his appearance of having just stepped out of a bath, and even now, after a long train journey, that appearance persisted. The two were room-mates in Upton Hall. They had been thrown together quite by accident the preceding fall and had not yet regretted the fact; which, I think, speaks well for each of them.

Stick wasn't an awfully brilliant chap. In fact, there were some who declared that he was rather a bore. But Russell was used to him, and he had long since decided that an even temper and similar attributes were preferable in a room-mate to mere conversational scintillations. Stick had rather a peculiar sense of humor, or, perhaps, lack of humor. He adored a practical joke when it was on some one else, but saw no fun in such a joke played on himself. As a fair sample of his ideal in the way of a funny story it may be stated that his favorite was a rather long and ponderous tale about a London window-washer who fell from the sixth story of a building and landed on a "bobby." To Stick there was something irresistibly appealing to his sense of humor in the

fact that the policeman was killed and the window-washer wasn't! But Stick was a fellow who wore remarkably well, and, after all, that's a fine quality in a room-mate.

"Well, I brought the money," he announced after a few exchanges of remarks anent the past vacation.

"How much?" asked Russell anxiously.

"A hundred and twenty-five."

"A hundred and twent— But, Stick, you said it would be a hundred and fifty at least!"

"I didn't say it positively," disclaimed the other. "I did think I could put in that much, Rus, but—well, I just can't do it." Then, after a short pause, he added in a desire to be strictly truthful: "I mean, I don't think I ought to, Rus. Of course, it's my money, and all that, but father doesn't think very well of the idea, and if he needed money some time he'd expect me to let him have a little, and if I put it all into this I won't have any left. You see, we don't know for certain that this thing's going to be a go. I hope it will be, for I'd hate to lose that money, but there's nothing sure about it, is there?"

Russell shook his head. "No, nothing's sure until it's happened, Stick, but this thing is bound to go all right. Gee, it's just got to!"

"Yes, I know," Stick agreed without much enthusiasm, "but things don't always succeed because some one says they've got to."

Russell sighed. "I wish your grandmother hadn't married a Scotsman, Stick!"

"What's that got to do with—"

"You'll die a poor man, Stick, just on that account," returned his chum gloomily. "Left to itself, the Irish in you would risk a dollar now and then, but that Scotch blood sets up a howl every time."

"It's all right to take a chance," said Stick seriously, "but there's no sense in being risky. I say, with what you have, won't a hundred and twenty-five do?"

"It will have to," answered Russell grimly, "if that's all you'll come in with. I've gone too far now to back down. I spent a whole day in New York, and every one was mighty decent, and I arranged for a whole raft of stuff to come down the twenty-second. The Proctor-Farnham people even offered me ninety days' credit. You see, their goods are new in the East, Stick, and they're making a big try to get them going. They make mighty good stuff, too, and I'm pretty certain we can sell a lot of it once we're started. Of course we'll have to carry the other makes, too. Some fellows won't look at a thing unless they grew up with it! Well, anyway, they were quite enthusiastic about the scheme and would have pretty near stocked us up for nothing if I'd agreed to sell only their stuff. But that wouldn't do. Not yet, anyhow. They offered to send a man down

to arrange a window display, but I had to decline that, for I didn't want them to know that we hadn't even found a store yet. They might have thought I was crazy. As it was I did a good deal of bluffing, I guess, and talked as if I had about a million dollars. The other folks were a heap more haughty, although they were willing enough to let us have a fair line of samples. They don't have to offer inducements to sell their goods, you see. Well, now about the money, Stick. I've got a little more than two hundred. That's three hundred and twenty-five, about three hundred and forty, really. I'd hoped for four hundred at least. It means that we'll have to be satisfied with a more modest store, for it's store rent that's going to be the principal expense for a while. I've been pretty well over the town, Stick. There are two places I'd love to have, but they're both on West street and the rent would be something awful. Then there are a couple of places out on the way to the station. They'd be cheap enough, but I guess we might just as well throw our money away as locate out there. Fellows never get that far from school."

"No, we've got to be somewhere around Bagdad," replied Stick. Bagdad was the Academy name for the two blocks on West street lying nearest to the school. Here was established a small shopping district quite distinct from that further in the town, one depending largely, though by no

means wholly, on the students for trade. The stores that lined both sides of the street were usually small, but, in the parlance of trade, "select." One found neckties of a rather more "zippy" coloring here, hats with a more rakish air, shoes with more character, clothing that bordered yet did not infringe on the sporty. And, of course, the stationery store carried the sort of books and blanks and binders and pens that Alton Academy affected, while The Mirror specialized in such highly colored and ultra sweet concoctions of ice cream and syrups, fruits and nuts as are beloved of all preparatory school youths everywhere. Bagdad, in short, provided for so many of the wants of Alton students that only once in a blue moon was it necessary for them to seek further afield.

"Yes," Russell agreed, "but I don't believe we can find anything very close that we can afford to take. There's one place—"

He broke off to look thoughtfully across at Stick.

"Well?" prompted the latter.

"It's upstairs, over The Parisian Tailors, on West street. But I don't like the idea, Stick. You know yourself that a chap won't climb a flight of stairs if he can find the same thing by walking a block or two further. And there's Crocker's store only five doors beyond. I guess that wouldn't do."

"Let's go and have another look," suggested

Stick. "There must be some place we can have. We've got an hour before we need to eat, Rus. What do you say?"

"All right, but there's no use going to Bagdad. We might try River street below West."

"Huh, no fellow ever sets foot over there! I say, I've got it!"

"Shoot, then, Stick."

"We'll hire half a store from some one who doesn't need it!"

"Why, yes, that might do," replied Russell slowly, "but where are we going to find it?"

"I don't know. Maybe we can't, but it's an idea, isn't it? Something to work on, eh? Let's go and have a look."

## CHAPTER III

### A NEW YEAR BEGINS

The journey of the little red car came to an end in three days instead of four, for Matilda developed distressing symptoms at a place called Bradford, got vastly worse at Mystic and broke down utterly some two miles short of New London. There for the present the three travelers left her and completed the trip by rail, parting one afternoon in the Grand Central Station with assurances of a speedy reunion.

Four days later, on the twenty-second, which was a Monday, Harley McLeod and Jimmy Austen reached Alton shortly after two o'clock and at half-past three were out on the football field with some sixteen other candidates. To-morrow would bring more, but sixteen wasn't so bad for a first session, and Martin Proctor, this year's captain, was plainly elated.

"Twenty-two fellows had the call," he said to Harley and Jimmy after they had shaken hands, "and you fellows make sixteen who have shown up. That's mighty good, isn't it?"

"When's Johnny coming?" asked Harley.

"Not until Wednesday. He telephoned this morning. He expected to come to-day, but some-

thing's happened. We won't need him, anyway. We can't do much more to-day and to-morrow than get the kinks out. Oh, say, Jimmy, that reminds me. You'll have to put in a lot of time on punting this fall. Keep that in mind, will you? Practice whenever you get a chance, like a good fellow. We've got to work up a kicking department with not much to build on. And we play Lorimer in a little over three weeks!"

"How does it seem to be captain, Mart?" asked Jimmy, grinning.

Mart Proctor smiled back, shook his head and then looked suddenly grave. "Well, so far, Jimmy, being captain's been a cinch. Spring practice was short and easy, as you know. And during the summer all I've had to do is write about a dozen letters a week, read half a million clippings sent by Johnny Cade—he cuts out everything he sees that relates in the slightest way to football and piles it all on me!—and try to look stern and important; and you know that's no easy job for a merry wight like me! But since I got here yesterday afternoon I've discovered that being captain of the Alton Football Team is about the same as being President of the U. S. of A. That guy Johnson's been at me every ten minutes with a new problem, Jake's sitting over there on the wheelbarrow trying to think up a new worry—Oh, gee, here comes Johnson again now!"

Henry Johnson, the football manager, was a

short, rotund and very earnest-seeming youth. His forehead, above the big spectacles that adorned his short nose, was creased into many deep furrows as he greeted Harley and Jimmy warmly but hurriedly and turned to Mart.

"Peter says he can't get the lines marked out to-morrow, Mart," he announced agitatedly. "Says he hasn't enough lime. Says he ordered it and it hasn't come, and—"

"We can get on without lines," replied Mart calmly but a trifle wearily. "Can't you find anything better than that to bother about, Hen? You ought to leave that small stuff to your helper."

The manager's frown relaxed slightly. "Tod hasn't come yet." The furrows came back. "He promised to get here to-day. He ought to be here, too. Some one's got to look after the weighing, and I don't see how I can do it, Mart. I've got that letter to get into the five o'clock mail—"

"Let the weighing go until to-morrow," said Mart. "We're all old stagers and don't need watching yet. You attend to the letter. Tod may come on the four-twenty, for that matter. Well, let's go, fellows! Oh, Brand! Brand Harmon! Take a bunch of the backs out and throw around, will you? You're in that, Jimmy. Mac, you'd better come with me and we'll try some starts. You've got six or eight pounds that you don't need, and so have I. Throw out some balls, Jake, will you?"

Jakin, the trainer, opened the mouth of the big canvas bag and trickled three scarred and battered footballs across the turf. Ned Richards, quarter-back candidate, pounced on one and slammed it hard at Paul Nichols, last season's center, and Nichols caught it against his stomach, doubled his heavy body over it and gave a high-stepping imitation of a back getting under way.

"Mawson off on a one-yard dash," he laughed.

"Shut up, Paul! Show respect to your betters!" And Mawson quickly knocked the ball from his grasp, caught it as it bounded and hurled it smartly against the back of the center rush's head.

"You're likely to break the ball if you do that," warned Ned Richards. "Hit him in the tummy instead."

There was an hour and a half of rather easy work, which, because the September afternoon was warm and still, reduced most of the candidates, veterans though most of them were, to perspiring, panting wrecks of former jauntiness. Two laps about the track at a slow jog did nothing to restore their freshness!

Harley McLeod and Jimmy Austen plodded back to the gymnasium together, Harley wiping his streaked face with one gray-clad arm. "I didn't know I was so soft," he sighed. "Bet you I dropped four pounds this afternoon, Jimmy."

"Soft living plays the dickens with a fellow,"

granted Jimmy. "I feel like a pulp myself. I guess if we weighed in this afternoon I'd be six pounds over. Gee, but it's good to be back again, Mac. The old field felt mighty fine underfoot, what? What's on for a week from Saturday? High School, I suppose."

"Yes. They scored on us last year, too. Remember?"

"Yes, Gil Tarver missed an easy tackle that day. I didn't get into the game. Did you?"

"No, Macon played right end. Banning scored on us, too, last fall. Maybe it's a good plan to get a couple of kicks in the shins in the early season. Wakes you up, maybe. Anyway, we came back and beat Kenly to the king's taste!"

"Hope we do it again, but I guess it's her turn this year."

"That's the wrong thought, Jimmy. Kenly ain't got no turn. Hold that, son. Say, maybe that shower isn't going to feel swell! Oh, boy!"

"Some fine moment, I'll remark! By the way, where are we eating?"

"Down town. Lawrence doesn't open until Wednesday morning. We'll get Mart and Rowly and some of the others and go to the Plaza. You can get a pretty good steak there."

"Yes," agreed Jimmy as they entered the building, "but I don't like those unclothed tables, Mac."

"Well, you don't have to eat 'em! Wonder

what's at the movie theater to-night. Want to go? My treat."

"Sure! Under such unusual circumstances—"

But Harley had hurried away to his locker.

Stanley Hassell, who roomed with Jimmy in Upton Hall, arrived early on Wednesday, registered at the office, unpacked and bestowed his belongings in their accustomed places to a running fire of comment and information from Jimmy and then accompanied the latter to the field and looked on while the now greatly augmented company of football candidates went through a long practice under a hot autumn sun and the darting eyes of Coach Cade. "Johnny," as he was generally called—though not to his face—was a short, compactly-built man of some twenty-eight years with a countenance rather too large for the rest of him on which various small features were set; such features as a button-like nose, two extraordinarily sharp eyes, a somewhat large mouth and a very square chin. Mr. Cade had rather a fierce appearance, in spite of his lack of height, but this was largely owing to a great deal of thick black hair that stood up bristle-like and defeated all attempts to make it lie down. Add to these items an extremely mild and pleasant voice and you have the Alton Academy football coach as he appeared to the many new candidates that afternoon.

Recitations began on Thursday morning, and the four hundred and odd youths of various ages

from twelve to nineteen who composed this year's roster took up scholastic duties again. When the nine o'clock bell pealed in Academy Hall the dormitories began to discharge their quotas. Young gentlemen, armed for the first fray of the term with text-books and note-books and pencils and pens, set their faces toward the vine-clad and venerable Academy Hall, along the flagged walk on which the morning sunlight, dripping through the trees, cast golden pools amongst the cool shadows. From Haylow, on the left of the row, from Lykes, beside it, from Borden at the extreme right and from Upton that was next, the youths trickled into the two streams that flowed briskly toward their confluence, the entrance to the big brick recitation hall. There were all sorts and conditions of boys in that larger stream that eddied through the wide doorway; short boys and tall boys, stout boys and thin boys, boys who swaggered and boys who went with the diffidence of the stranger, boys with sunburned faces and boys with cheeks too pallid, boys in short trousers and boys in long trousers, boys with straw hats, boys with soft caps and boys with bare heads, high-spirited boys and home-sick boys, eager boys and boys whose feet lagged on the steps; all kinds, all descriptions of boys; just such a medley as is always found when the bell summons to the first recitation on a late September morning.

In a month, even in so short a time as a week,

maybe, the sorts will be fewer, the difference between this boy and that less apparent. Already the influences that in the end mold all toward a certain pattern will have been felt, and Jack will have begun to model his conduct and speech and attire after those of Tom, who, impressed with the stamp of one or more years at the school, already tends toward the ultimate pattern. That pattern varies with different schools, yet it is much the same in essentials, and, on the whole, it is a good pattern, being founded on a wise discipline and builded of cleanliness of mind and healthfulness of body, of self-respect and self-control and, always, the love of fair-play.

To-day there was the genial warmth of a still New England early autumn morning over the scene. The elms and maples that bordered the streets still held their verdant leaves and the grass that grew between the graveled roads and paths that intersected the School Green was still unchanged. The Green extended along the west side of Academy street for two blocks and from that quiet thoroughfare arose at an easy grade for the width of another block to the line of brick and limestone buildings that spanned it. Yet, following the center path, one passed two structures ere the wide steps of Academy Hall were met: on the right, near River street, Memorial Hall, containing library and auditorium and a few class rooms, and on the left, close to Meadow street, and partly

hidden by trees, the modest and attractive residence of the Principal, Doctor Maitland McPherson, known to the School more simply, yet quite respectfully as "Mac." Behind the main row of buildings stood two others, the Carey Gymnasium, a recently built, up-to-the-minute structure, and, to its left and directly back of Academy Hall, Lawrence, where Alton boys flocked thrice a day and performed certain rites at many long, white-draped tables. Having passed Lawrence and Carey, one passed a cluster of tennis courts and saw, spread out before him, several acres of fine turf whereon, close at hand, were set many steel-framed stands between whose tiered seats appeared the blue-gray ribbon of the running track and the gleaming white lines of the first team gridiron. To the left was the diamond, and ere the further confines of the tract stayed the wandering gaze a second baseball field and a second gridiron met the sight. Far away was a faint glint that told of the river, though the stream was hidden for most of its way by trees that, beyond its winding course, marshaled themselves into a forest and marched westward over the low hills toward the sunset.

But we have wandered far afield. Let us retrace our steps as far as Upton and climb the first flight of stairs. Half way along the corridor to the right is a door numbered 27, and under the numerals two cards are secured with thumb-tacks,

These bear the following inscriptions, in the first case written, in a rather round hand, with pen and ink, in the second case imprinted by the engraver's art: Russell Wilcox Emerson—George Patterson.

Beyond the now closed door only one of the young gentlemen named is to be found. Russell, seated in front of the study table in the center of the small yet pleasant room, bends over a sheet of paper that looks very much like a bill of goods. At the top in fat black letters appears the legend: The Proctor-Farnham Sporting Goods Company. Follows a Broadway, New York, address, and then come many typewritten lines, each ending in figures that form a column down the right-hand margin of the sheet. With pencil in hand, Russell reads, frowns and lightly checks the items, and finally, having reached the bottom of the paper, he leans back in his chair, taps the pencil against his teeth and stares dubiously across to the open window. During the last few days it has become more and more apparent that the merchant who starts in business with insufficient capital must expect anxious moments. Removing his gaze from the window, Russell opens the small drawer at the right and takes out a very new bank book. Reference to the first—and so far only—item set down therein fails, however, to lift the frown from his brow, and, sighing, he looks once more at the appalling total beneath the column of figures on the bill, shakes his head, returns the small bank book

to the drawer and glances at his watch. Although the nine o'clock bell had held no summons to him, it will be different when ten o'clock comes, and it is already very close to that hour. So he places the troubling bill in the drawer, drops several other documents upon it and hides them all from sight with a slightly vindicative *bang*. But, had you been there to look over his shoulder, your gaze would doubtless have fallen on the topmost document and you would have perhaps wondered at the presence of what was at first glance a florist's bill. Then, however, looking further, you would have beheld beneath the printed inscription —"J. Warren Pulsifer, Florist, 112 West Street" —the scrawled legend:

"Received of Russell W. Emerson Twenty-two Dollars and Fifty Cents ($22.50) for one month's rent of premises.

"J Warren Pulsifer."

## CHAPTER IV

### JIMMY READS THE PAPER

*The Doubleay* was written and edited in the sanctum in Academy Hall and printed in a small job printing shop over Garfield's grocery on State street. As school weeklies go, *The Doubleay* was a very presentable sheet. Typographical errors were only frequent enough to encourage the reader of a humorous turn of mind to a diligent perusal of the four pages; the advertising matter was attractively displayed and the editorial policy was commendably simple, being to present the news accurately and briefly. The paper was published on Thursday and distributed to subscribers and advertisers by a more or less efficient corps of six young gentlemen, usually freshmen, who received the munificent reward of half a cent per copy. The first issue of the paper this fall came out on the second Thursday of the term, and, according to custom, contained six pages instead of the usual four, the added matter consisting of the student list arranged by classes and printed on two sides of a half-sheet under the impressive legend: *The Doubleay—Supplement.*

Now, if your transom was open when the carrier reached your door you found the paper on the

floor when you returned to your room, or, if it happened to flutter under a bed or into the waste-basket, you discovered it the next day or a week later or not at all, as the case might be. To-day, however, Stanley Hassell pushed it aside with the opening door when he and Jimmy returned from the gymnasium and, picking it up, tossed it to the table.

"All the news that's fit to print," he commented. "The old *Flubdub's* out again, Jimmy." Stanley intended no disrespect to the journal: he merely used the customary name for it. Jimmy sighed as he sank into a chair and reached for the paper.

"Why, I'm glad to see its cheerful face again," he murmured. "And doesn't it look familiar! I wonder if any of the old friends of my youth are missing." He was silent a minute as he turned the pages and as Stanley stretched himself on a window-seat that was four inches too short for him. "No," Jimmy went on, "they're all here: Sampson's Livery, Girtle, the Academy Tailor, Go to Smith's for Stationery, The Best Soda in the City, College Last Shoes—all the dear, familiar old friends of me youth, Stan. And here's Gookin, the Painless Dentist, still holding out a welcoming hand, and the Broadway Theater and the New York Haberdashery and—yes, here are a couple of new ones! I tell you, Stan, the old *Flubdub's* a live un! 'After the Game—Drink

Merlin Ginger Ale.' Now, why should I, Stan? Seems to me it's not enough to just tell me to drink the stuff: they ought to give me a reason why—hello! Well, I'll be swiggled! Listen to this, will you? 'The Sign of the Football. R. W. Emerson and G. Patterson announce the opening of their shop at 112 West street with a full line of Athletic and Sporting Supplies and cordially solicit the patronage of their fellow students. Quality goods at New York Prices. Academy Discount. "PandF spells Best!" ' "

"That's the Emerson we found waiting on table at the hotel," exclaimed Stanley interestedly. "At least, I suppose it is. I don't believe there's another Emerson in school."

"I'll soon tell you," said Jimmy, rescuing the Supplement from beside his chair. "Emerson, E., Dribble—that's a swell cognomen, if you ask me!—Dutton, Eager—none in the senior class. And none in the junior—yes, there is, 'Emerson, Russell Wilcox, Lawrence, N. Y., U. 27.' "

"That's this fellow," said Stanley. "R. W., Russell Wilcox. Any others?"

"N-no, not in the— Hold on, though. Here's another in the freshman bunch: 'Emerson, Ernest Prentice—' "

"Not him. He wouldn't be a freshie. Besides, the initials aren't right. But who's G. Patterson?"

"Seems to me I remember a Patterson," mused

Jimmy. "Of course! You know him; at least by sight. Tall, thin gink; curly hair; Canadian, I think. Rooms in Upton. Wasn't he trying for baseball last spring?"

Stanley nodded. "Yes, but didn't make it. I believe he's a bit of a tennis shark. I remember. Maybe he and Emerson room together."

"Right-o!" corroborated Jimmy, referring again to the list. "What do you know about them opening a store? Got their courage, what? Athletic goods, eh? Well, honest, Stan, there's a mighty good chance for some one to handle a decent line of athletic goods here. Crocker never has what you want, or, if he has, it's so old it falls to pieces before you can use it. Remember the glove you bought last spring?"

Stanley nodded earnestly. "Fool thing went to pieces the third time I wore it," he grunted. "Crocker's higher than thunder, too. He doesn't know the War's over yet! Wouldn't be surprised if these fellows did pretty well, Jimmy."

"Nor I; and I hope they do. This Emerson guy seems to have a lot of grit, or—or something. Initiative, too. Plucky chap. I liked his looks that day at Pine Harbor." After a moment, his eyes returned to the advertisement, "Say, what do you suppose this cryptic bit means? 'PandF spells Best.' What's PandF?"

"You may explore me," replied Stanley, yawn-

ing. "Maybe a misprint for P and E, Patterson and Emerson."

"But it's 'Emerson and Patterson.' Besides, the thing's run together, like one word."

"It's probably put there to make fellows curious, just as it's made you, Jimmy. Sort of a—a—what do they call 'em? Slogans, isn't it? Like 'It Floats,' or—or—" But to save his life Stanley couldn't think of another example, and he subsided on the pillows again with a grunt.

"Yes, but what's 'PandF'?" reiterated Jimmy, frowningly. "Potatoes and Farina? Pork and—and—"

"Cabbage," suggested Stanley. "Queer how your thoughts always run toward food, Jimmy. Isn't there anything else in the paper?"

"I guess so. Let's see." Jimmy turned to the first page. "'Record Enrollment'; that's about the number of fellows; four hundred and twenty-four, Stan: 'estimated.' Don't see why they have to estimate. Maybe they didn't have time to count 'em, though. 'New Courses Offered.' Avaunt! 'Football Situation.' Hm, the usual twaddle. 'Not in recent years has the Team lost so many of its first-string players by graduation.' Guess that's so, too. 'Of those who started the Kenly game last Fall but three remain to serve as a nucleus about which to build this year's Eleven; Captain Proctor, tackle, Nichols, center, and Mawson, half-back. The situation is not, though, as

desperate as this fact would make it appear, as there is much excellent substitute material on hand. Rhame and McLeod, ends, Rowlandson, guard, Cravath, center, Richards, quarter-back, Harmon, Austen, Longstreth and Kruger, half-backs, and Browne and Linthicum, full-backs, have all had experience, and from them Coach Cade will doubtless be able to select a Team of no mean ability. What may develop from the new candidates is problematic, but nearly always one star appears unheralded.' Hurrah! There's a lot more of it, but as I don't see my name again we'll quit. And here's the schedule. 'Alton High School, Banning High School, Lorimer Academy, Hillsport School, New Falmouth High School, Mount Millard School—' Say, look where Mount Millard comes, Stan; second game from the last!"

"Sure! Why not?"

"How come?"

"Why, you dumb-bell, didn't they whale us last year, 19 to 0?"

"That's so, but—"

"Well, we've put them down the list where we can handle them. Who's next?"

"Oak Grove. Then Kenly. We have three games away from home."

"All faculty will allow. Good thing, too, if you ask me."

"I hadn't, old dear, but I will. What's the answer?"

"Takes too much money traveling around with the team."

"Oh! Yes, there's something in that. Here's a bit about the baseball situation, but who cares about that? Let's see, now—"

"Read it," commanded Stanley.

Jimmy looked across protestingly. "But it's of absolutely no interest to any one except a few mistaken idiots who—"

*"Read it!"*

"Oh, well!" Jimmy sighed. "'Fall baseball practice, which started Monday, brought out an unusually large field of candidates. Six of last year's creditable Team were on hand—'" Jimmy paused and sniffed. "'Creditable!' How do they attain that condition? 'On hand, and practically all of the Scrub Nine. Of new men the more promising at present are Dixon, who hails from Springfield High School, and Jameson, from Earl Academy. Captain Grainger announces that daily practice will be held as long as the weather permits, and asks all those who expect to take part in baseball next Spring to report at once.' There, there wasn't a single mention of your name, Stan. I knew there was no call to read the piffle."

"We'll have a corking team this year," mused Stanley.

"Huh, you said that last year, and look what Kenly did to you!"

"That's all right," replied the other warmly,

"We landed seventeen out of twenty-one games and tied one—the best record in—"

"Son, you lost to Kenly, and that's the unforgivable sin," interrupted Jimmy didactically.

"Oh, well," grumbled Stanley.

"Not, of course, that baseball is a sport to be taken seriously," continued Jimmy lightly. "We can lose at soccer and tennis and baseball and still hold our heads up; which is extremely fortunate, too. Those minor sports—" He broke off to dodge a cushion, and then looked at his watch. "Geewhillikins, Stan! It's after six! Move your lazy bones and let's eat!"

Whereupon all was bustle and action in Number 4 Lykes Hall.

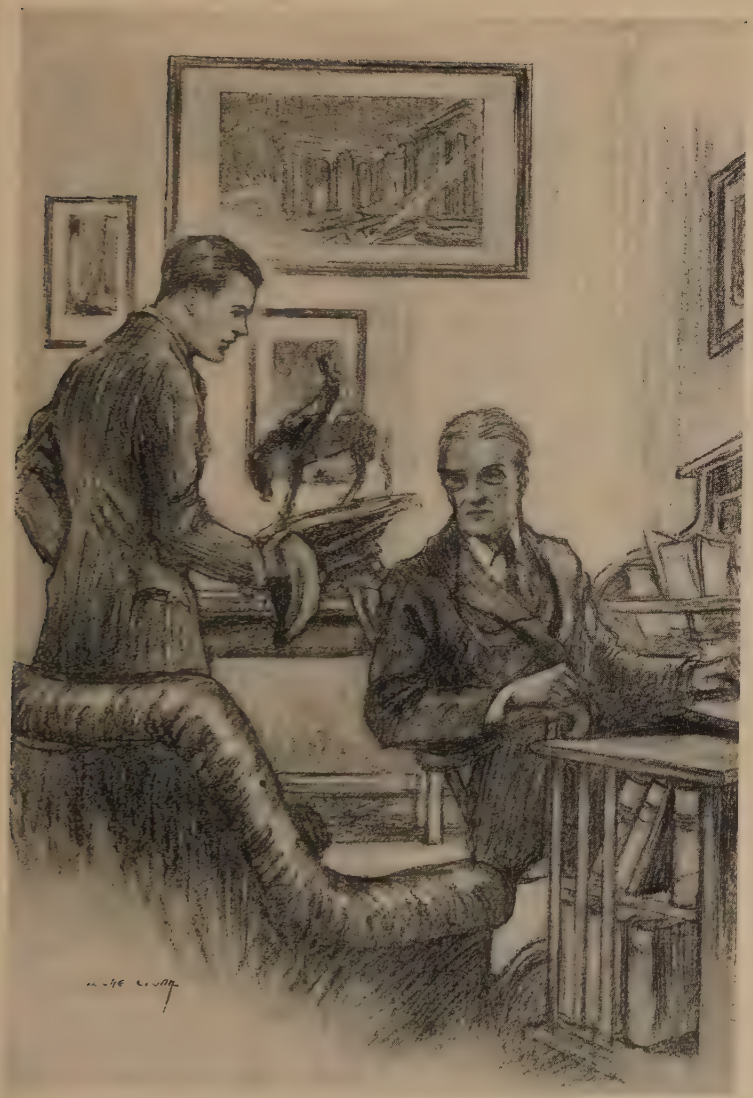
## CHAPTER V

### RUSSELL EXPLAINS

Doubtless Doctor McPherson's copy of *The Doubleay* was delivered to him absolutely on time, but the Doctor was always a busy man, and this was still very close to the beginning of the term, and so it was not until he was at ease in his very large and very old-fashioned green leather armchair that evening that he found time to scan the pages of the school weekly. This was a thing that he invariably did with much interest, for the paper echoed very clearly the pulse of the School. The Board of Editors and Managers were representative fellows and published their opinions—which were the opinions of their schoolmates—very frankly. In fact, as the Doctor recalled as he turned to the first page, there had been times when their frankness had been almost alarming; certainly embarrassing to him and the faculty! The Doctor was very thorough in all that he did, which probably accounts for the fact that, having perused and digested the news and editorial portions of the paper, he considered the advertisements, and with scarcely less interest. And, having reached one of them, he read it twice, frowning a little, and then, drawing a memorandum-pad

toward him along the top of the big desk, he made three funny little characters on it, which, since the Doctor numbered a knowledge of short-hand among his other accomplishments, meant much more to him than it would have to you or me.

The direct result of those three lines and pothooks was the appearance the next forenoon of Russell Emerson in the school office and his prompt passage to the Principal's private sanctum beyond. This room, which Russell had never before entered—and had never pined to!—was a large, high-ceilinged chamber with cream-white walls and woodwork and three massive windows toward the Green. It was saved from coldness and austerity by the huge mahogany bookcase along the farther wall, by a soft-piled green rug occupying most of the floor space, by a big mahogany desk in the center of the rug and by the presence along two walls of some half-dozen armchairs of the same warm-toned wood. Nevertheless, the first effect of that chamber on Russell was awesome, if not alarming. Although conscious of no lapse from the straight and narrow path, he nevertheless felt most uneasy as he closed the heavy door behind him, responded to the Principal's smiling "Good morning, Emerson" and seated himself in the chair that stood beside the nearer end of the desk. Secretly curious, he sent a hurried look along the top of the shining mahogany, thinking that perhaps there would be



"Rather an unusual proceeding, Emerson," pursued the doctor

somewhere in sight a clew to this unexpected summons. But the desk, save for some half-dozen books between handsome bronze book-ends in a distant corner, a large leather-bound writing pad under the Doctor's elbow and a combined ink-well and pen-tray beyond it, was absolutely empty. Nor did the Doctor's brown and rather sinewy hand hold anything that appeared like incriminating evidence. It held, in fact—I am referring to the hand that held anything—only a sharply-pointed yellow pencil which the Doctor, as he inquired politely as to Russell's health and, subsequently, the health of Russell's parents, slipped slowly back and forth between his fingers, alternating sharpened lead and rubber tip against one gray-trousered knee. Then he laid the pencil down on the blotting-pad, very exactly, so that it lay absolutely parallel to the rim of the pad, and came to the subject.

"I read in the *Doubleay,* Emerson, that you have opened a shop in the town—in West street, I believe—for the sale of athletic supplies."

He paused, and Russell said, "Yes, sir."

"Rather an unusual proceeding, Emerson," pursued the Doctor. "Unusual, that is to say, at this school. It may have been done elsewhere. Would you mind telling me why you have embarked in this—ah—enterprise?"

"Why," replied Russell a trifle blankly, "to make money."

"I see. But do you really need money? That is, more money than, I presume, your parents allow you?"

"Yes, sir," answered the boy emphatically. "My tuition is paid until the end of this term, sir, but if I'm to remain here for the rest of the year I'll have to pony up—I mean I'll have to pay for it myself." Russell paused, frowned a little and looked speculatively at the Principal. The latter smiled faintly and nodded.

"Yes, I would," he said.

Russell looked a bit startled and a bit questioning.

"Tell me all about it," explained the Doctor. "You were wondering whether you should, weren't you?"

"Well, I—" Russell began apologetically. Then he smiled and began anew. "You see, sir, my father isn't very well off. I guess I oughtn't to have come here in the first place, but I wanted to pretty badly, and father said I might as well have the best as any, and so I came. It went all right the first two years, but last spring things got sort of bad in our town. Folks got out of work and went away, and those that stayed didn't have much money and didn't spend much of what they had. And a good many didn't pay their bills. So father's business sort of ran down and we didn't have much money."

"What is your father's business, Emerson?"

"He keeps a store, sir, a sort of general store. He told me away back last March that if things didn't pick up soon there wouldn't be much chance of my getting back here, and I tried to think of some way of making money so I could come back. I'd helped in the store a good deal and so, naturally, I thought of selling something, and I was pretty sure that athletic goods would go pretty well here, because there isn't any one in town that makes a specialty of them, you see. Crocker, the hardware man, carries some, but he tries to shove off second-rate stuff at first-class prices, and the fellows have been stung a good deal. Then there's another man away down town, Loring, who carries a few things, but he's a good distance off, and his stuff is kind of second-rate, too. When the football team or the baseball team or the hockey team want supplies they send to New York for them, and that takes time and they don't get any different goods than what we carry."

"I see," commented the Doctor interestedly. "And so you and Patterson, your room-mate, decided to start this shop. That was last spring, you say?"

"We didn't exactly decide then, sir. That is, I decided to do it if I could, but I couldn't get Stick—that's Patterson, sir: his name's George, but every one calls him Stick—I couldn't get him to promise until about the middle of the summer. I'd have gone into it alone, only I didn't have

enough money, and Stick had some he'd saved and I wanted it. You see, it takes quite a lot to get a thing like this started, sir."

The Doctor nodded gravely. "Undoubtedly," he agreed. "And between you, you managed to get enough together to put it through, Emerson?"

Russell shook his head ruefully. "No, sir, not enough, but—well, it has to do," he answered a bit defiantly. "Stick didn't want to—I mean he found he couldn't put in quite as much as he thought he could, sir, and I didn't make quite as much during the summer as I'd expected to, and so it left us sort of short when the time came."

"You worked during the summer, then?"

"Yes, sir, I waited on table at the Pine Harbor House. They didn't have a very good season. Too much rain and cold weather. A lot of the fellows made less than I did, though, so I guess I oughtn't to kick," added Russell thoughtfully.

There was silence for a moment, and then the Doctor, having taken up his pencil again, said: "I don't want to pry into matters that don't concern me, Emerson, but it must have taken at least several hundred dollars to start this shop of yours. Now, just suppose that there isn't the demand for your wares that you anticipate. What then? It's going to whisk that money away, isn't it? You've laid out most of it, I presume, on goods, you've had to sign a lease of the premises you occupy and you've paid some rent already. Have you

thought what may happen? What happens every day in retail business?"

"Yes, sir," replied Russell. "It's a risk, I know, but it isn't as big as you think, I guess. We didn't have much money to start on and so we don't stand to lose very much, even if all went, which it can't. We've taken only half a store and we've leased it by the month. A florist has the rest of it, a man named Pulsifer. You see, we couldn't afford to take a whole store, not where we wanted it, and so we made an offer to this florist fellow and he fell for it right away. He had more space than he needed, except around Christmas and Easter time, and he was quite keen about renting it. Then we haven't put in a very big stock, sir. You see, there are so many things that we have to handle that we just couldn't begin to keep them all. So we have samples of most everything and a fair line of the fall things. If we don't happen to have what's wanted to-day we telephone to New York for it and we get it to-morrow."

"I see," said the Doctor. "And of course you aren't depending solely on the Academy trade?"

"No, sir, we're after the High School fellows and the public generally. But we do expect to get a good deal of patronage from the Academy. In fact, sir, what I want to do ultimately is persuade the athletic teams to trade with us instead of New York!"

"Well, I endorse your courage, Emerson, and I trust you won't be disappointed. That is—" The Doctor stopped and frowned at the pencil. "To be frank, Emerson," he went on, "I had some idea of persuading you to give up this scheme when I sent for you. I say persuading because there is nothing in the rules of this institution that empowers me to forbid it. The mere fact that it has never before been done doesn't prohibit it; although it is probably the reason that there is no regulation that does! I dare say you can understand why the faculty would view such a proceeding askance, Emerson."

Russell looked frankly puzzled and finally shook his head. "No, sir, I'm afraid I can't," he said.

The Doctor's brows went up a trifle and he smiled faintly. "Really? Doesn't it occur to you that keeping a shop might interfere somewhat with the real purpose of your presence here?"

"You mean it might keep me from studying, sir?"

"Exactly, from study and progress, which, after all, Emerson, are what you are here for."

"Why, but don't you see, sir," exclaimed Russell, "that if I don't run that store I can't stay here? Why, I—I'm doing it just because I want to study and learn! I'm doing it so I *can*, Doctor McPherson!"

The Doctor's golden-brown eyes lighted kindly and the creases that ran from each side of his

straight nose to the corners of his rather wide mouth deepened under his smile. "Yes, I do see it, my boy," he replied heartily. "And because I see it I've quite changed my course of action since you arrived. I certainly would not like to see your example followed by—well, by many of your companions, Emerson. And for that reason I trust shop-keeping won't become the fashion here at Alton! But in your case—well, we'll see how it works out. I sincerely hope that we shall be satisfied with the results, Emerson. And I certainly hope you will, too. In fact, I wish you the best of luck, my boy. And, while I know very little of merchandising, I'll be very glad to give you any assistance in my power. And"—whereupon the Doctor's eyes twinkled—"I'll certainly patronize 'The Sign of the Football' in preference to the gentleman who keeps second-rate goods at first-rate prices! Good morning, Emerson."

"Good morning, sir," stammered Russell. "And—and thank you."

"Not at all. And let me know how you're getting on sometime!"

## CHAPTER VI

### BILLY CROCKER DROPS IN

Alton played her first game two days later, against the local High School team. The latter had suffered quite as much as the Academy from graduations, and the eleven that took the field to oppose the Gray-and-Gold knew very little football. Alton fairly ran High School off her feet in the first half, scoring three touchdowns and missing two excellent opportunities to kick goals from the field because of the Coach's instructions to play only a rushing game. Along in the third period Mr. Cade began to send in substitutes, and ere the brief contest was ended Alton had tried out just twenty-one players. There was only one score in the last half, the result of a blocked kick on Alton's thirty-two yards. High School, held for downs, had attempted a goal, but a plunge of eager Alton substitutes had borne down the defense and the ball had bounded aside from some upstretched arm to be gobbled up by Harmon and borne fleetly down the field. There was little opposition, for the nearest High School pursuer reached the final white line a good two yards behind the swift-footed left half-back. Harmon, rather tuckered, was taken out and Mawson re-

placed him, and it was Mawson who strove to add another point to the Academy's total of 26. But his attempt was weak and the ball never threatened the cross-bar. That was in the third period. In the fourth the playing on both sides became amusingly ragged, and fumble followed fumble and signals were mixed and the spectators fairly howled with glee at times. Twice over-eagerness was penalized under the visitor's goal and so two more probable touchdowns were averted. High School showed one brief session of determined offensive in the third quarter and, taking advantage of Crocker's sleepy game at right end, managed two long runs which, together with a rather flukey forward pass, landed the pigskin on Alton's twenty-two yards. There, however, the attack petered out and, after losing seven yards in three downs, High School faked a try-at-goal and tossed forward over the line, where the ball landed untouched on the turf.

Considered even as a first contest, the afternoon's performance wasn't encouraging from an Alton standpoint, for the line had been slow and had played high, the backs had worked every man for himself, with no semblance of team-play, and even Ned Richards' generalship had been particularly headless. Against an equally green and much lighter team, Alton had failed to show any real football. However, one swallow doesn't make a summer, nor one game a season, and so Coach

Cade had little to say after the contest, and the audience, taking itself lazily away through the warm sunlit afternoon, chose to view the humorous aspects of the encounter and disregard its faults. Harley McLeod did fairly well at right end until he gave way to Billy Crocker, and Jimmy played at right half during a brief and glorious third quarter and retired with a bruised and ensanguined nose.

In the Coach's room, across Academy street from the Green, Mr. Cade and Captain Mart Proctor conferred long that evening and in the end reached the conclusion, among other less certain ones, that the task of building a team this fall was going to be a man-sized job!

Jimmy had determined that he would drop in at The Sign of the Football and look the shop over at the first opportunity. By that he meant the first occasion when he was in want of something that might reasonably be expected to be on sale there. But it didn't seem that the opportunity would come, for, with the football management supplying everything from head harness to shoe-laces, there wasn't anything he stood in need of. Nor, between the reading of the advertisement to Stanley that Thursday afternoon and the hour of eleven on the following Tuesday, did he even get as far from the Green as West street. He had heard, though, many comments on the Sign of the Football. Among his acquaintances

the store was treated as something of a sensation, while Russell Emerson and his partner in the enterprise were both scoffed at and commended. The idea of an Alton student descending to shopkeeping disturbed many fastidious ones, while others thought it rather a joke—though they couldn't seem to put their finger on the point of it!—and still others declared that it was a corking good stunt and they hoped Emerson and his pal would make it go. Jimmy lined up with the latter when the matter was discussed in his hearing, and so did Harley McLeod, as, for instance, on Monday night when a half-dozen fellows were gathered in Harley's room in Haylow. The number included Jimmy and Stanley, Ned Richards, Harley's room-mate, Billy Crocker and Cal Grainger, the Baseball Captain. It was the latter who introduced the subject when, apropos of something Ned Richards had said regarding his finances, he informed them that anything approaching financial depression wouldn't bother him hereafter as he and Brand Harmon were going to open a tea shop in the town.

"Keeping a shop is getting to be all the rage," he explained airily, "and those that get into it early are going to reap the shekels. Brand and I have got it all doped out. Some swell little joint we're going to have, too. Rose and gray is to be the—the color motif. We're going to have three kinds of tea: hot, cold and Oolong; and a full line

of sandwiches and cakes. Wait till you see us swelling around there with the High School girls! Fine moments, boy, believe me!"

"Better stock up with chewing gum," suggested Ned Richards. "From what I see, I guess that's about all those High School girls ever eat!"

"You're jealous because you didn't think of it yourself," retorted Cal untroubledly.

"Hope you get more trade than those fellows who opened the sporting goods store are getting," said Billy Crocker. He was a rather large, though not heavy, youth, with black hair and thick eyebrows that met above his nose. The latter, being beak-like, gave him an unattractively parrotish look. Billy lived at home, in the town, but spent most of his evenings at the Academy. He wasn't especially popular, and fellows sometimes found themselves wondering why it was he was so frequently in evidence at such gatherings as tonight's. The explanation, however, was very simple. Billy Crocker took his welcome for granted and didn't wait for a formal invitation. Being a football player, he affected the company of the football crowd, and although many protested him as a nuisance he was allowed to tag along. "I've looked in there twenty times," continued Billy, not too truthfully, "and I've never seen any one there yet. They're a couple of nuts!"

"As a member of the Alton Academy Merchants' Association," began Cal protestingly.

"They must have some money they don't need," interrupted Ned Richards enviously. "I heard they'd put a thousand dollars into the thing."

"A thousand dollars!" scoffed Billy Crocker. "More like a hundred! Why, those fellows haven't any money, Ned. They're on their uppers. Patterson wears clothes that were made when Grant took Richmond!"

"What scandal is this?" murmured Jimmy. "Who's Grant?"

"Well, that's what I heard," replied Ned coldly. "Of course, if the gentlemen are personal friends of yours, Crocker—"

"They're not, thanks," answered Billy emphatically. "I don't—"

"They're friends of mine, though," cut in Harley. "At least, Emerson is. And I wish him luck. He's got courage, that chap. Guess it's so about his being poor, though, for we came across him two or three weeks ago waiting on table at a hotel at Pine Harbor. He was a good waiter, too."

Jimmy rather wished that Harley hadn't told that, for, while he had only admiration for the deed, he doubted that Ned and Cal and Billy Crocker would view it in the same way. However, no one looked other than faintly interested; no one, that is, save Billy Crocker. Billy laughed scornfully. "Those fellows would do anything to get a bit of money," he said. "It was Patterson

who wore Irv Ross's suit up and down West street a couple of years ago, with a placard on him like a sandwich man, and all for a dollar and a half. You fellows remember."

"Yes, but it was Stacey Ross's suit, and not Irv's," said Stanley. "Girtle charged Stacey ten or twelve dollars more than he charged another chap for the same thing. Girtle said it was because the other fellow paid cash and Stacey didn't, but Stacey was mad clean through and got Patterson to put the suit on and walk up and down in front of the store with a placard saying 'Bought at Girtle's.' Of course the clothes hung all over Patterson—"

"That's all ancient history, Stan," said Harley.

"Well, what I was getting at is that, as I remember it, this fellow did it for a joke and wasn't paid for it."

"He certainly was paid," exclaimed Billy. "I know!"

"He ought to have been," remarked Ned. "Anyway, Stan, there's no sense in arguing with Crocker about what his friends do or did. He's in the know, aren't you, Crocker?"

"I told you they aren't my friends," answered Billy gruffly. "I don't know either of them, except by sight."

"Then why," asked Ned, yawning, "persist in talking about 'em?"

"I only said they wouldn't make that store pay," replied the other defensively. "And they won't."

"Say, Crocker," inquired Jimmy, "isn't it your father or uncle or something who runs the hardware store?"

"Father," said Billy in a tone that suggested reticence.

"Thought so. Maybe you're a bit prejudiced then. You folks sell the same line of stuff as Emerson and Patterson do, eh? Guess you don't like the idea of a rival almost next door."

"All those fellows will sell won't affect my father any!"

"Say!" This explosive exclamation came from Stanley, who suddenly sat up very straight on Ned's bed and fixed Billy with a baleful glare. "Say, is that your store, Crocker?"

"My father's," answered Billy with dignity.

"Well, say, let me tell you something then. You sell the punkest stuff that ever came out of the ark! Honest, Crocker, you do! Say, if Patterson's clothes were made by Grant at Richmond, or whatever it was you said, the baseball gloves you take good money for were made by Mrs. Cleopatra the day she got bitten by the snake!"

"They're just as good as you can get anywhere," protested Billy indignantly. "Baseball gloves aren't made as well as they used to be, since the War, and if you got a bum one you

ought to have brought it back, Hassell, and—"

"There wasn't enough of it to bring back," said Stanley grimly, "after the third time I put it on! And I'm blamed if I see what the War's got to do with baseball gloves. The trouble with you folks is that you got stocked up about twenty years ago and the moths have got busy!"

The rest, with the notable exception of Billy Crocker, were laughing and chuckling at Stanley's tirade. Billy was flushed and sulky. "We can't help it," he muttered, "if the sewing on a glove gives way sometimes. That's the way they come to us, and we buy the best we can find—"

"Listen," said Stanley impressively. "The sewing was the only part of that glove that held together! It was the leather that was rotten, and if I—"

"Have you still got it?" demanded Billy, goaded to desperation. "If you have, bring it to the store and I'll see that you get another."

"Of course I haven't got it," answered Stanley disgustedly. "I bought it last spring, and the last I saw of it, it was hanging over the wire netting back of the home bench, where I pitched the blamed thing!"

"Well, the next time, you bring it back," said Billy. "We don't want any one dissatisfied."

"There ain't going to be no next time," answered Stanley significantly. He subsided on the pillows again. "No hard feelings, Crocker," he

added apologetically, "but your store certainly does carry a bum lot of athletic goods."

There was more laughter, and Billy decided to join in, which he did with what grace he might, and the troublesome subject lapsed.

Crocker left some twenty minutes later with Cal Grainger, although the latter showed no overmastering desire for his company, and when the door was closed Stanley asked: "What do you see in that fellow, Mac?"

"How do you mean?" asked Harley. "He isn't my pal. He comes to see Ned."

"What?" demanded his room-mate. "Gosh, I never asked him here! I thought maybe you had. I'm not keen for him, let me tell you. I've hardly spoken a hundred words to him, and then only on the field, and did you hear him calling me Ned? Cheeky bounder! I was tickled to death when you pitched into him about your old glove, Stan. He was as sore as a poisoned pup!"

"*Old* glove!" exclaimed Stanley, in arms again. "It was a *new* glove, gosh ding it! And I wore it just three times and—"

"Oh, sweet odors of Araby!" groaned Jimmy. "You've gone and got him started again! Listen, you fellows! I have to hear the history of that glove ten times a day, and it does seem that when I get out in society, as 't were, I might—might—"

"Glove?" broke in Harley gravely. "What glove is that? Did you have a glove, Stan?"

"Oh, dry up," muttered Stanley. "I'm going home. But I'll tell you chumps one thing," he went on with returned animation. "Those fellows who have the new store are going to get *my* trade!"

"Ha! Their success is assured!" cried Jimmy. "Stan buys a fielder's glove every spring, and all they've got to do is hold until maybe April or May—"

"Any one been in there yet?" asked Harley.

No one had, it appeared. "I haven't even seen the place," said Ned. "I hear they've got a real jazzy sign, though; a football, you know, hanging on a whatyoucallit."

"Sounds mighty effective," mused Jimmy. "Just what is a whatyoucallit?"

"Oh, a—one of those things that stick out—"

"A sore thumb?"

"—From a wall. A crane, isn't it?"

"I think that's a bird," replied Jimmy, "but I know what you mean. A—a sort of—of iron projection—"

"Brilliant conversation, I'll say," interrupted Stanley. "Come on, you dumb-bell. The best place for an intellect like yours is a pillow." He propelled Jimmy, still struggling for expression, to the door. "So long, fellows! What he means is an arm."

"But I don't!" wailed Jimmy as the door closed. "I don't!"

## CHAPTER VII

### JIMMY GOES SHOPPING

Jimmy was very conscientiously obeying Mart Proctor's request to practice punting. As a senior who was not overburdening himself with extra courses, Jimmy had several periods of leisure between nine in the morning and three in the afternoon, and while these periods came at different hours on different days they never failed, and, as it happened, Tuesdays came very close to being full holidays for him. On those days his morning was blissfully free from the requirements of class attendance, and not until eleven-thirty did his schedule mean a thing to him. Usually there was some one on the field when Jimmy arrived who was quite willing to chase his punts and kick them back to him, and so he had already put in a good many hours of work outside the regular practice sessions. He had requisitioned a football from Jake and kept it in his room, since more often than not he went from dormitory to field without stopping at the gymnasium for a change of raiment. Casting aside his jacket, he was ready for the task, since he always affected knickerbockers. An old pair of football shoes, one having a tan lacing and the other a black, which ordinarily

kicked about under his bed collecting dust, were donned before leaving the room. On Tuesdays, however, Jimmy dressed for the work and engaged the aid of some football aspirant whose hours of leisure matched his.

On this particular Tuesday, the day following the small events narrated in the preceding chapter, Jimmy, having picked up the football from where it had lodged under Stanley's bed, viewed it with disapprobation. It was a very old ball, and a very scarred and battered one. As Jimmy mentally phrased it, it had whiskers all over it, by which he meant that what may be termed the epidermis of the ball was abraded and scruffy and adorned with little—for want of a better word—hang-nails of leather which in Jimmy's opinion mitigated seriously against both distance and accuracy. Of course he couldn't expect a brand-new ball, but it did seem as if Jake might have found one less feeble and senile than this! Why, the poor thing ought to have been retired on a pension years ago! Jimmy viewed it dubiously and at last distastefully, dropping it from one hand to the other. If he had a decent ball to work with—

Well, why not? If the management wouldn't afford him one, why not buy one of his own? Why not indeed? Jimmy tossed the ancient pigskin from him, unmindful of direction or ultimate destination, pulled out the top drawer of his chif-

fonier and selected two bills from a number that reposed in a small box there. Then he looked at his watch. He had commandeered Neirsinger, a quarter-back candidate, for half-past nine. It was now twelve minutes after. In eighteen minutes he could get to West street, purchase a new football and—well, if not reach the field at least get within sight of it. So, stuffing the money in a pocket, he hurried forth and down the stairs and across the Green by an illegal but well-defined path that led straight to the center gate. Being like most of us a creature of habit, Jimmy's subconscious mind was leading him to Crocker's hardware store, and to Crocker's hardware store he would have gone, so, doubtless, moving Stanley to reproaches, had his eyes not caught sight of an unaccustomed object when, having traveled the block between the Green and West street, he turned to his left on the latter thoroughfare.

The object was suspended above a doorway a half-dozen rods from the corner, a sign about two feet in length and somewhat less than a foot and a half wide. It hung from a projecting wrought-iron rod, at right angles to the building, and presented a bravely gay broadside to the passers, for paint and gilt were still new and fresh upon it. There was background of dead black against which was portrayed a golden-brown football. Above and below the ball read the legend in plain but quaintly old-fashioned lettering: Sign of the Foot-

ball. The letters, like the molding that surrounded the whole, were of gilt. In its way, that swinging sign was quite a work of art, and Jimmy, who had a keen appreciation of the picturesque, paid it tribute ere, stopping stock-still two doors away, he viewed it fixedly, frowningly for a moment. Then:

"'Inverted bracket,'" he muttered triumphantly. "'Inverted bracket.' That's it!"

He went on triumphantly, aware now that he had no business to transact at Crocker's, and wondering that he had forgotten the new store. Under the glittering sign he stopped and observed the windows. In that at his left were displayed four weary-looking geraniums, bearing a few pink blossoms, in pots; two ornamental vases filled with dahlias of various hues; a glass sign that leaned against the vases and proclaimed in gold letters against a black ground: Pulsifer the Florist—Funerals a Specialty; and, finally, somewhat in the background and so unobtrusively suggestive, a wreath of artificial ivy and white roses. Jimmy turned from this appalling display with a shudder and moved to the window beyond.

This, he told himself commendingly, was better. Against an expanse of clean white paper lay, at either side, a pennant; at the left the gold-and-gray of Alton, at the right the blue-and-white of High School. Between these had been assembled a fairly enticing array of seasonable articles: a

football, a head harness, a nose-guard, one of the small horns affected by umpires, a shining nickel whistle, two pairs of shoes, two pairs of woolen hose, a tennis racket, a box of felt-clad balls and one or two other objects. Across the back of the window hung a low curtain of dark blue material and against it was a colorful poster: a brawny youth in togs, football nestled against his ribs, arm outstretched, face stern with ferocious determination, spurning a vividly green sod beneath flying feet. Below the figure was the cryptic legend: "PandF spells Best."

Jimmy entered the store. It wasn't a very large store, even for West street, and it was rather dark. On the left was the establishment of J. Warren Pulsifer: a long counter, bare save for some wrapping paper and a box of pins, a desk surrounded by iron grilling, a refrigerator, or what looked like such, behind whose glass doors could be indistinctly glimpsed a modest stock of flowers in tall, brown papier-mâché receptacles. There were, also, two tiers of shelves back of the counter, and these held an array of dusty boxes. Behind the iron grilling a tall, dejected looking man with faded hair and mustache looked anxiously up from his desk as Jimmy entered and then with a slump of his narrow shoulders that was, Jimmy was certain, accompanied by a sigh of relief, returned to his occupation.

The other side of the store held a duplicate of

the long counter, but it had been recently varnished and so presented a different appearance. Varnished, also, had been the shelves beyond, while a six-foot show-case near the entrance lent an added air of luxury. In fact, this side of the store was, in contrast, almost startlingly gay. Boxes of various colors thronged the shelves, pennants hung above them, a blue-and-white sweater lay across the counter, articles of leather and metal gleamed from the show-case, show-cards and posters and placards were numerous. Jimmy thought, in fact, that there were rather too many of these latter, even if they did lend a certain air of business. Viewing cannily the, after all, rather scanty furnishings and stock on hand, he felt that there was something akin to bravado in that display of advertising placards.

There was but one customer within when Jimmy arrived, a small youth of perhaps a dozen years who was frowning doubtfully over a helmet displayed before him on the counter. Behind the latter stood the senior partner of the new firm, and at Jimmy's appearance he looked up inquiringly.

"Hello," said Jimmy, ending his leisurely inspection of the premises. "I'd like to get a football, please. No hurry." He had quite forgotten Neirsinger and the flight of time.

"Just a moment," answered Russell. The boy laid the helmet down with a sigh of rejection.

"Maybe I'll be back," he muttered, and turned away from the counter with a last desirous look at the article.

"All right," replied Russell cordially. "Glad to see you."

Jimmy smiled as Russell turned to him. "Didn't have enough money, I guess," he said.

Russell shook his head, and smiled, too. "I showed him a cheaper one, and one that would have fitted him, but he said he wanted to buy one he could 'grow into'! You wanted a football?" He reached to a shelf behind him, drew down a box, set it on the counter and took the lid off. The box was empty, and he pushed it aside and reached for another. "Silly to put the empties back on the shelf," he said carelessly as he opened the next box. Jimmy's gaze roved over the rows of boxes and he smiled quizzically, but to himself.

The football looked very good to him as he searchingly examined it, but it was different from those he had been used to, a fact explained when his eyes fell on a design lightly burned into the outer leather. It was a diamond enclosing the characters "P. & F." Curiosity clamored. "Say, for the love of lemons, Emerson, what does 'P. & F.' mean?" he demanded.

"Proctor and Farnham. They're the makers. Ever used any of their goods?"

"No, never heard of them. New folks?"

"New in the East. They've been making foot-

balls and things for years and selling in the West. They've just begun to go after this part of the country and we succeeded in getting the agency here. Very good stuff they make. Notice the way that ball is sewed? Those seams can't open in a hundred years, I guess. And that leather's the best horsehide procurable. There's a big difference in leather, you know. Some balls scuff up the first time they're used after they've been once wet."

Jimmy nodded. "I know. Looks pretty good, still I'm sort of used to the other balls, Emerson."

"I can sell you your kind," Russell returned, "but I'd like awfully to have you try one of these. You see, fellows are sort of shy of new things and you've got to get them started. After that they go all right. If you care to try this Proctor and Farnham ball I'll guarantee to give you a new ball or your money back if you decide you don't like it after a fair trial."

"Fair enough," said Jimmy. "I'll take it. By the way, what's the price?" His eyebrows lifted when he heard it and he frowned a little. "What's the price of the others?"

"Just the same," replied Russell, folding a paper neatly about the pasteboard box.

"But that's forty cents less than Crocker asks!" protested Jimmy.

"Then they ask forty cents too much," an-

swered the other calmly. "I think you'll find Crocker's prices going down before long."

"I wouldn't wonder," agreed Jimmy. He picked up a pair of greenish-gray sport hose from the counter. "How much are these?"

"Three and a half," said Russell. "We've got some good ones for less, though."

"Guess I don't need any just now, but those are mighty good-looking. Doing any business yet, Emerson?"

"Fair," answered Russell, exchanging the bundle for Jimmy's money. "Of course, it takes time to get started."

"I suppose so." With bundle in hand, Jimmy showed little inclination to hurry away. "You seem to have a pretty big stock here," he went on. "Must take some money to get a place like this going."

Russell nodded. "Quite a bit," he agreed. "We haven't laid in much except fall stuff yet. Have to go a bit slow at first."

"Yes," mused Jimmy. He was wondering if the storekeeper recognized him. If he had he certainly hadn't shown it by so much as a flicker of his eye-lids. "Say, I saw you at that hotel at Pine Harbor, didn't I?" he asked.

"Yes, I waited on you there," replied Russell readily.

"I thought so," murmured Jimmy. He was sitting on the edge of the counter now, swinging his

legs thoughtfully. "Say, Emerson, I like your pluck," he continued after a moment. "Working there at the hotel, you know, and then starting this place. Makes me feel downright lazy and no-good, though. Hope you'll have all kinds of success."

"Thanks," said Russell, a little surprised. "I guess I wouldn't be doing either thing if I didn't have to, though, Austen; so I suppose there isn't much credit coming to me."

"Rot!" said Jimmy. "Lots of fellows need money and never think of getting out and hustling for it. They just let the old man come across with it. Don't see why a fellow shouldn't help his folks put him through school and college. Wish I could do it myself!"

"Can't you?" laughed Russell.

Jimmy shook his head and frowned. "Wouldn't know what to do nor how to do it," he answered. "Besides, my father wouldn't—" But he stopped there. "How do you fix it for time?" he resumed. "I mean, don't recitations interfere with looking after this place?"

"Yes, but we manage pretty well. You see, Patterson's a senior and I'm a junior, and most days we make it go all right. If we can't either of us be here Mr. Pulsifer explains that we'll be back in an hour. I suppose we lose some custom that way, but it can't be helped. The store is closed for an hour at noon, too, but lots of them do that

in this part of town. To-day I'm here until a couple of minutes to ten and then Stick—that's my partner—stays until twelve. I'm here always in the afternoon from three-thirty to six, and sometimes Stick comes over, too. When there's no one to wait on we can study pretty well here."

"I thought you were playing football with the second, though," said Jimmy.

"I had to give it up," replied Russell. "Some one has to be here afternoons, and three mornings a week I can't get around at all and Stick has to do it all."

"Too bad, though," Jimmy said. "About football, I mean. Still, maybe they don't need you much. The scrubs have been pushing us around pretty fiercely so far." Jimmy looked at his watch, whistled and jumped to the floor. "I must be getting back. I'll give this ball a try-out this morning, Emerson, and let you know how I like it. And I'll see that fellows know about your prices, too! Good luck!"

So Jimmy went his way briskly, a full twenty minutes late, and Russell, folding up the stockings that the customer had admired, smiled contentedly. He had at last succeeded in selling a "P. & F." football, after several attempts, and, fortunately, to a fellow who, for some unknown reason, was anxious to boost the store. Russell decided to order four more balls that very day, since, in spite of the brave array of boxes on the

shelf which looked as if they might contain footballs, the only other ball in stock reposed in the window!

When, presently, Stick Patterson arrived Russell announced to him the sale with much satisfaction and delegated to him the writing and mailing of the order to New York. Stick was equally pleased, but he voiced doubts as to the order. "They cost a lot of money, Rus," he said. "Better get two instead of four, don't you think? We can order two more later if those sell."

"All right," Russell agreed. Sometimes Stick's conservatism was a trifle dampening, but he realized that it wasn't a bad idea to have such a check on his enthusiasm. Without it his optimism might some day lead him to an error of judgment. "I'll bet we'll sell them, though, Stick. Austen's sort of a leader in his crowd, and if he likes that ball he will say so, and from what he said I know he wants to like it, and I'm sure he will."

"I fancy the ball's all right," returned Stick cautiously, "but not many fellows buy them. Did he want tick?"

"No, he didn't say anything about having it charged. I was mighty glad, too, for I'd have hated to have lost a customer like him."

"Wish the fellows that come around when I'm here were like that," retorted Stick. "They always want tick and get sore when I tell them we don't give credit. Any one else in, Rus?"

"Only a small kid looking at a helmet. He may be back. I tried to sell him one of the cheap ones, but he wouldn't have it. Well, I'll run along, Stick."

"All right." Stick seated himself behind the counter near the window, leaned his chair back and opened his book. "Say, Rus, how much longer do you think we can hold out if we don't do any more business than we've been doing?"

Russell stopped at the door and leaned across to speak in a voice so lowered that it would not reach the rather prominent ears of Mr. J. Warren Pulsifer. "About three weeks, Stick," he said soberly. "But we're going to begin to sell things long before that, so don't get the crêpe out yet. You wait and see, Stick!"

"I'll wait, all right," grumbled Stick as the other hurried out, "but I'm sure of one thing, and that is I wish I'd never let him get me into this blamed partnership!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SECOND TEAM COACH

"WANT to try a good ball, Mart?" asked Jimmy that afternoon while the candidates were assembling for practice.

Mart Proctor accepted the pigskin and looked it over critically. "Where'd you get it, Jimmy?" he inquired. Jimmy explained and Captain Proctor dropped the ball to the ground, caught it on the rise, balanced it in his right hand, tried it in his left and then fell to a careful inspection of the seams.

"Looks good," he commented.

"It is good," responded Jimmy earnestly. "Try a kick, Mart."

So Mart, nothing loth, swung a sturdy leg, dropped the ball and watched with satisfaction its forty-five-yard flight down the field. "Kicks well," he acknowledged while a willing youth chased the pigskin and hurled it back. "Let's see it again, Jimmy."

But while Jimmy was handling it a third person joined them. "What make of ball is that, Cap?" asked Mr. Cade.

"I don't know. Jimmy here is booming it.

Something he got in the village at the new store a couple of the fellows have started."

"Proctor and Farnham," commented the coach as he read the label. "Oh, yes, I've heard of it. Used out West a lot, I believe. Very sturdy looking trick, isn't it? Feels nice, too. A good wet weather ball, I'd say. Grain's very heavy, if you notice. Gives you a good hold."

"It's the best ball I ever put a foot to," declared Jimmy impressively. "I can get a lot better distance with it than I can with the ball we're using."

The coach smiled. "They must be giving you a commission, Austen," he laughed. "I'm glad, though, you like it. Only, don't get so used to it that you won't be able to kick one of our sort. How you getting on, by the way?"

"Oh, pretty fair," replied Jimmy modestly. "I guess I'm sort of getting the hang of it. Neirsinger and I put in a couple of hours this morning."

"That's fine," said the coach. "Well, let's get started, Captain Proctor."

So Jimmy deposited his ball with Jake the trainer, with instructions to guard it with his life, and departed to the field where for the succeeding thirty minutes he trotted about behind Appel in signal drill. The second team proved far less formidable that afternoon and the first walked through its line three times for touchdowns and

ran rings around it meanwhile. Rumor had it that Steve Gaston, second team coach, expressed dissatisfaction very strongly to his charges after the day's work was over. Certain it is that on Wednesday there were several changes in the scrubs' line-up, changes which resulted in a smaller total of points for the first team, but which did not entirely satisfy the big coach. Gaston had spent two seasons as a second team player, for some not quite explicable reason never reaching the first. Perhaps this was because he knew football just a little better than he could play it. Last season an injury to his leg had laid him off a few days before the end, an injury which seemed at the time inconsequential enough but which had afterwards proved so serious as to bar him from football for two years at least. Had it not been for that injury Gaston would have been this year's second team captain. As it was, a wise Athletic Committee proffered him the position of coach, and Steve, bitterly resenting the fate which had deprived him of the fierce joys of the game, could have wept with delight. Of course he did nothing of the kind. All he did do was accept with a contained air and earnestly promise to show the committee and the School the best scrub eleven of recent years.

It is frequently easier to promise than to perform, however, and now, in the second week of the term, Steve Gaston was learning as much.

He had started, a week since, with a promising lot, many of them veterans from last year, a few old campaigners with two years of service behind them. He had gathered a scanty handful of likely youngsters from last season's freshman and dormitory teams, youngsters, of course, who for one reason or another were not yet varsity caliber. Falls, an experienced guard, had been made captain, and the second had started off with fair prospects. The difficulty in building up a second team, however, lies in the fact that just as sure as a player shows anything resembling remarkable ability a hawk-eyed first team coach snatches him away. This is likely to happen, too, toward the end of the season, when there is scant time left in which to break in a substitute. But it may happen at any period, and Steve prayed for a team that would be composed of hard, steady workers and that would contain not a single "phenom."

The start was like most starts. The first team, playing together better, made Steve's aggregation look very weak and very futile. But that was to be expected. It took time—yes, and patience, too —to weld seasoned, plugging veterans and inexperienced, high-tensioned newcomers into a smoothly-working whole. After a few days the scrubs began to lose some of their rough edges and Steve relaxed a bit.

Thursday brought new frowns of perplexity to his rather rugged and very earnest countenance.

The ends were not what they should be, nor did they look to Steve like fellows who could be taught. Then, too, on the other side of center from Captain Falls, the guard position worried him. On Friday he switched a full-back candidate to the guard position and tried young Williams, who had played quarter rather brilliantly on a dormitory eleven last fall, at left end. But the results were not satisfactory. The backfield man lacked the steadiness required of a lineman, and Williams' performance showed Steve that he was sacrificing a good quarter-back in the securing of a doubtful end. Steve cudgeled his brains and, after supper that Friday night, metaphorically seized his club and set forth on his man-hunt. At a little after nine he arrived at Number 27 Upton.

His prey, attired in a stained and faded old blue flannel dressing gown, his stockinged but slipperless feet supported on his bed, his chair tipped precariously back so that the light from the green-shaded lamp fell over his shoulder, was deep in study. On the other side of the table Stick Patterson sat with head in hands and nose close to his own book. Stick was down to trousers and shirt, for the night was warm. Visitors were infrequent at Number 27, and so when the somewhat imperative knock sounded both occupants looked up startledly. It was Stick who called "Come in!" in a decidedly ungracious tone of voice. Then Steve Gaston entered, big and broad-shouldered

and, somehow, momentous looking, and Russell's chair came down with a crash of its front legs and his dressing-gown was ineffectually drawn together.

"Hello, Gaston," said Russell, surprised. "What—I mean— Do you know Patterson?"

Steve didn't and shook hands rather perfunctorily and took the chair that Russell yielded. Russell perched himself on the bed and gathered his scantily covered knees within his arms. He thought now that he knew Gaston's mission, for he had suddenly recalled the forgotten fact that Gaston had become second team coach. Steve smiled, but it was plainly only a sop to etiquette, or whatever law it is that decrees that a guest must show pleasurable emotion on arrival. So, perhaps, did the Cave Man smile ere he raised his club and smote, subsequent to dragging off his victim. Although Steve didn't smite, having got that brief smile out of his system he approached his errand with as little delay as his distant progenitor.

"How does it happen you're not with us this fall, Emerson?" he asked severely.

Russell, who had determined to put on a bold front and be as adamant to all pleas and protestations, secretly quailed a little. There was that about this big, serious-faced youth that made him wish he had not been discovered in dressing-gown and "undies"; his attire, or lack of it, put him at a disadvantage, for it is difficult to do battle,

even moral battle, when your unclothed ankles stare up at you from under the frayed hem of a dressing-gown and you are distressingly aware of a large hole in your left sock! Russell had to blink once or twice before he answered, and blinking took time and looked like hesitation and so weakened his cause right at the outset.

"I haven't time for football this year, Gaston," he answered finally. "You see, Patterson and I have started a small store—"

"Yes, I know that," interrupted Steve impatiently. "I hope you do well, Emerson. But that store won't take all your time, I guess. We're up against it for good men this fall and I'd take it as a real favor if you'd give us a hand, old man."

That phrase "good men" didn't unduly elate Russell. He knew that Gaston would use it in like circumstances to any fellow he might be after. Still, there was a pleasant sound to it. Russell shook his head, though, and steeled himself.

"I'm afraid it can't be done. I'd like to, Gaston, but I'm in this store business to make some money, and there's only Patterson and me to look after it. Patterson tends the place most of the morning, generally, and so I have to be down there afternoons. If it wasn't for that—"

"You played end a good deal last year, didn't you?" Steve asked. Russell felt helplessly that Gaston hadn't been one bit impressed by what he had told him. Russell nodded dolefully.

"Quite a bit," he conceded.

"Thought so. We need you, Emerson. Got a place ready and waiting for you. Fact is, I want to make this year's second something the School will remember and talk about for the next ten years. I want to turn out a rip-snorting bunch of fellows that'll make the first team sit up and take notice. You've got to have a good scrub team if you're going to have a good first, Emerson. You can't train a first team against a lot of easy-marks and then beat Kenly. No, sir, you've got to have something hard to go up against, and the better your second team is the better your first will be. Well, I mean to give the school a great second, Emerson, and that's why I'm after you; you, and a couple of others who have been playing possum. I want all the good stuff I can get hold of, and, believe me, I'm going to get it!"

"Yes, of course," answered Russell uneasily, glancing toward his room-mate for assistance. Stick, however, was pretending to study, and Russell saw that he must expect no help from that quarter. He went on more firmly. "I wish I could help you, Gaston—"

"Oh, not me, Emerson! Never mind about me! It's the School you're going to help, you see. Keep that thought in your mind, son. You can't turn down the School, can you?"

"Why, no, but—"

"When a fellow can play football, Emerson, he's

got a duty to the School, and you don't need to be told that. Fellows like you don't hesitate at a sacrifice when the good of Alton is at stake. And you've been here long enough to know that a fellow who goes out and does his best on the second is doing just as much for the success of the big team as he would be doing if he played on the first instead." Gaston was horribly earnest, and his brown eyes bored Russell's implacably. Russell stirred uncomfortably.

"Well, but, you see how I'm fixed, Gaston," he said pleadingly. "I—we've put quite a little money in this thing, and we can't afford to lose it. Fact is, between you and me, we—the store hasn't got started very well yet, and it wouldn't do at all to get careless about it. Now, if—"

"No, indeed," agreed Steve quite heartily. "Naturally, you want to make it go. I don't blame you. I'd see what arrangement I could make, Emerson." He glanced at Stick. "I dare say Patterson can fix it somehow to take charge in the afternoon long enough for you to get in some work. A couple of hours would do. Patterson would be doing his part, too, that way. Every fellow wants the team to win, of course, and is willing enough to do what he can."

Patterson looked over and scowled. "That's all right, Gaston, but I can't tend that shop morning and afternoon both. I've got recitations and

things. Seems to me there must be plenty of chaps for your team without Rus!"

"Got to have him, Patterson." Steve arose smiling calmly but inexorably. "You fellows fix it up between you. You can do it better without me, so I'll be going along. I'm grateful to you, Emerson, for doing what you're going to do, even if, as I've said, it isn't as a favor to me. And the School doesn't miss these things either. Well, I'll look for you Monday, old man, and I'll give you a chance to be mighty useful. Good night. Good night, Patterson."

"Night," replied Stick morosely.

"Good night," said Russell. "You—you mustn't count on me, though, Gaston. I'll think it over and if there's any possible way—"

"Sure! I understand. That's the way to talk." Steve paused in the open door and smiled back appreciatively. "Monday at three-thirty, then!"

When the door had closed Russell stared blankly across at Stick and Stick scowled darkly back at Russell.

"A nice mess you've made of it," growled Stick disgustedly.

## CHAPTER IX

### AT THE "SIGN OF THE FOOTBALL"

Alton expected a rather hard game with Banning High School, which she had succeeded in beating last year by the small margin of two scores to one. Banning, however, proved scarcely more formidable than Alton High had been, and on Saturday afternoon the Gray-and-Gold, playing a fairly ragged game herself, romped off with the contest to the tune of 27 to 6. Banning's touchdown came to her as the result of a clever quarterback run from midfield to Alton's thirty-four yards, followed by a forward pass that again gave her her distance and laid the pigskin on the twenty-two. Two attempts past tackle were foiled and Banning prepared for a try-at-goal, her left half-back, who performed such feats for her, retiring as far as the thirty-three yards. Alton read in this a fear of having the kick blocked and was unprepared for the play that followed. The Banning half, having received the ball from center, romped away toward the right side of the field, drawing the adversary with him. Only Harmon, the opposing left half, refused to be taken in, and when, besieged by the enemy, the Banning runner side-stepped, poised the ball and threw hard and

far diagonally across the gridiron, over the tangled lines of the players, it was Harmon who saw the danger and raced to meet it. But a Banning end, who had sneaked unobserved well toward the left side-line, caught the hurtling ball perfectly and, although challenged an instant later by Harmon and plunged at by Ned Richards a few feet from the goal line, sped over for Banning's score. The handful of Banning supporters cheered rapturously and even the Alton crowd clapped their applause for a very pretty stratagem.

That happened in the second quarter and practically brought the half to its close. Banning missed the goal and left the score 13 to 6. In the second half Alton took revenge, adding two more touchdowns to her portion, both in the third quarter. Neither was spectacular, the Alton team plunging again and again at the enemy line, satisfied with short and certain gains. Once Moncks was banged through from the four yards and once Browne went over from the two. Captain Proctor attempted three of the goals and made each. The fourth, after Mart had given place to Butler at left tackle, was missed by Mawson, though by a few inches only.

The game showed better team-play by the Gray-and-Gold and better generalship by Ned Richards, but most of the faults which had been so apparent in the earlier game were still visible. Second and

third substitutes had their inning in the fourth quarter and, at least, made the game more interesting if less scientific. Jimmy Austen had two chances to show what he could do at punting, and whether it was because he didn't like the ball as well as his precious "P. & F." or whether he was perturbed by the frantic efforts of the opponents to get through on him, the fact remains that he sent off two of the poorest punts seen on Alton Field in many a day.

Russell wanted very much to witness that game, but Patterson, who had been in a continual state of disgruntlement since the evening previous, made no offer to relieve him of duty at the store and Russell didn't care to make the request. So far as business was concerned, though, he might almost as well have gone to the field, for there were only two customers and their combined expenditures amounted to but three dollars and forty cents. Russell was getting not a little alarmed over the lack of trade. Of course, as he told himself frequently enough, it took time to establish a business, but now the store had been open for more than a fortnight and the total of its sales—well, Russell didn't like to dwell on that! Stick was more than alarmed. There were times when he showed absolute panic and loudly bewailed his connection with the enterprise. Without putting it in so many words, he managed to convey the impres-

sion that he held his partner to blame for enticing him into the enterprise, that, indeed, Russell had somehow managed to blind his better judgment. Stick was vastly afraid that he was going to lose his capital, and if he could have got out without impairment of it he would have gladly done so. Russell frequently wished devoutly that it was in his power to return Stick's contribution to the fund, but that was quite out of the question. More than half of the capital had already disappeared. Stock, rent, advertising, half a hundred incidental expenses had eaten it up as a March sun consumes a snowbank. And sometimes, looking over the scanty stock on hand, encountering the doleful, pessimistic countenance of Mr. J. Warren Pulsifer, Russell thought there was just about as much left to show! At such times he had to go outside and look up at the gay cheerfulness of that sign above the door. Somehow that sign always restored his spirits.

This Saturday afternoon, however, as he waited in the darkening store for the hour of six to arrive and release him, his worries were complicated by that overnight conversation with Steve Gaston. Russell had a rather highly developed conscience, and he wasn't able to get away from the idea that perhaps Gaston was right and that his duty to the School ought to take precedence over everything else. The fact that it appeared to be a phy-

sical impossibility to play football on the second team and conduct the business of The Sign of the Football at one and the same time added to the complications. Even if he should reach the decision that it was his bounden duty to join the second, how was he to do it? It would be useless to look to Stick for assistance. Stick had already and on four occasions assured him emphatically that he didn't propose to do all the work connected with the store and that he'd be switched if he was going to sit around down there half the morning and all the afternoon while Russell went out and played football. Stick wasn't keen on football, anyway, and he didn't hesitate to say so. Russell had spent a whole hour trying to work out a schedule that would equalize their store duties and yet give him two hours each afternoon between three and five, and had signally failed. It couldn't be done. The only alternative appeared to be the employment for a part of the day of a paid assistant, and Stick wouldn't consider that for a moment. And Russell couldn't blame him. With affairs as they were now, paying out good money, even a little of it, to a clerk would be rank absurdity. In fact, Russell didn't seriously consider the plan himself. Faced squarely, the situation came to just this, he ruefully concluded. Either he must keep out of football or he must close the store each afternoon between three and five, or even half-past five, a period during which trade,

should it ever discover the Sign of the Football, might well be expected to prove heaviest. Russell sighed and shook his head and kicked dolefully at the counter. Kicking at the counter appeared to bring him no relief and seemed to prove irritating to Mr. J. Warren Pulsifer, who glanced across reprovingly from where he was sadly making up a funeral wreath of wilted ferns and forlorn white carnations. Russell desisted. He wished there was some one he might talk it over with, some one with common-sense whose judgment he could rely on. He had quite a number of friends and acquaintances, had Russell, but, passing them before his mind's eye, he found them all wanting. Ordinarily he could have thrashed the matter out with Stick, but as regards the present question Stick was badly prejudiced. And then, just as he was giving vent to another doleful sigh, there was a shrill and cheerful whistle at the open doorway and Jimmy breezed in.

Jimmy had a badly wrapped parcel under one arm from which protruded the label of what was, for all the world to know, a carton of biscuits of a popular and well advertised brand. Jimmy whistled because he was rather in the dumps, and it was for the same reason that, having hurried himself into civilian clothes after the game, he had set forth alone for Bagdad and the bazaars thereof. It always cheered Jimmy up wonderfully to spend money, and to-day, being in need

of cheering after his dismal fiasco as a punter, and having plenty of money on hand, he had fared from store to store and bought a number of things of which he stood in no immediate want—mostly edible! He dumped his disintegrating parcel on the counter and smiled brightly, gayly at Russell.

"Hello," he greeted. "How's the busy mart of trade, Emerson?" He glanced across the store and then swung himself to a seat on the counter. "Guess I'll buy me one of those things," he went on in a lower and confidential tone, nodding toward the wreath. "Place it on my dead hopes, Emerson."

"Dead hopes?" repeated Russell questioningly and smilingly.

"Ah," replied Jimmy, "you weren't at the game, then. I see. If you had been you wouldn't have asked that question, Emerson. Yes, sir, my poor dead hopes. You see, I had an idea that I could become a punter. I toiled and moiled—Say, what is that? Anyway, I did it, and to-day Johnny let me in in the last quarter and I tried twice to punt the ball and each time I—well, the thing almost hit me on the head when it came down!"

"Dropped the ball too late, probably," offered Russell. "I guess it takes a lot of practice, punting. You'll probably bring it off all right the next time. By the way, what do you think of that ball you bought here?"

"That's what I dropped in about," said Jimmy, brightening again. "Came over for a few eats"—he glanced unenthusiastically at the parcel—"and thought I'd drop in and tell you about that there ball, Emerson. It's a corker! It's a dream! It—it's all right! Say, honest, if I'd had that ball in the game I'd have poked it fifty yards, Emerson. Honest, I would! I like it mighty well, and I've talked it up a lot. Showed it to Mart Proctor the other day; and Johnny Cade, too. I wouldn't be surprised if you sold quite a few of them this fall. Well, how are things going with you? Been busy to-day?"

"Fairly," answered Russell. Then, encountering Jimmy's straight and level gaze, he shrugged. "I guess there's no use lying, Austen," he corrected. "Business has been rotten this afternoon, and every other afternoon."

"Thought so," said Jimmy. His eyes roamed over the poorly lighted store and came back to Russell. "I guessed the other day that a lot of this was just bluff." He nodded backward at the shelves. Russell flushed slightly. "Not that it isn't all right," added Jimmy quickly. "Bluff's a part of every game nowadays, I guess. And I like your nerve. So business isn't rushing, eh?"

"It isn't even crawling," responded Russell wryly. "At least, it isn't crawling this way."

"I wonder," mused Jimmy, "if you didn't make a mistake in locating over this way instead of fur-

ther down town. You'd ought to get the trade from the town folks, Emerson; high school and grammar school fellows, you know, and that crowd. I'm afraid there isn't enough business among the Academy fellows to make it go. What do you think?"

"Well, I wanted the Academy trade first," said Russell. "I can get the other trade, I believe, if I can wait long enough. But the question is, can I wait? I—we've advertised in the High School paper, and we're running a small ad. in the town paper three times a week. They gave us a pretty good reading notice last Saturday. Something ought to come of those ads."

"Sure to," agreed Jimmy comfortingly. "Later on, now, when fellows start baseball, you'd ought to do better, too. Fellows buy baseball stuff more than they do football. Take the dormitory teams, for instance. They'll be starting up this week, I guess. Well, most every fellow will have a shirt and a sweater and a pair of breeches, and that's about all they'll need. Maybe they'll be along to buy a nose-guard or a pair of stockings, and that's their limit. They get an old football from the first team, one that's been through ten wars, and that fixes them. Baseball, though, is different. Every chap wants to own a ball and a bat and, maybe, a glove—"

"It's a long time till spring," interrupted Russell. "Look here, Austen, do you know any good

reason why the football management shouldn't buy their stuff here instead of sending to New York for it?"

Jimmy looked startled for a moment. Then: "Why, n-no, I can't say I do, Emerson. Of course, they always have bought their truck in New York, but—" Jimmy stopped and viewed the other with dawning suspicion. "Say, is that what you're after?" he asked incredulously.

Russell hesitated, looked away and finally nodded. "Yes," he said, "it is. I haven't told any one else, Austen, but that's what I had in mind. If we can get the job of supplying the school teams we're fixed. We can do it, too, just as well and just as reasonably as any place in New York. That's what I'm working for. It will take time, though, and meanwhile we've got to keep going. And that's going to be the tough part. It's harder than I thought it would be."

Jimmy was staring reflectively at the floor. At last: "Do you know Sid Greenwood?" he asked.

"No. He's basket ball captain, isn't he?"

"Yes. You'd better meet him. Coolidge, too. Bob's hockey captain. And—yes, by jove, Stan ought to be able to help you. You know my chum, Stan Hassell, don't you?"

"Just to speak to," replied Russell, doubtfully. "I don't think he knows me, though."

"Yes, he does. We were speaking of you just the other day. Now I tell you what you do, Emer-

son. You drop in at our room some night; say to-morrow; to-morrow's Sunday, isn't it? Thought so. Yes, you come around and we'll talk this over. I don't see why Stan shouldn't have something to say about where baseball stuff is bought. He's captain. And I'll try to get either Bob Coolidge or Greenwood there; maybe both. If you could get the job to supply the basket ball team and the hockey team it would be a help, eh? And then, maybe, we can wangle the baseball situation, too, later. Gordon, the manager, is sort of a pill, but Stan can put something over on him, I guess."

Jimmy was quite radiant, and his infectious grin met a ready response from Russell. "That's mighty fine of you," stammered the latter. "It would be a dandy start just to get one of the teams, Austen. Don't know why you should take all that trouble, though. But I'm—"

Russell's further and somewhat incoherent remarks were interrupted by Mr. J. Warren Pulsifer, who, having deposited the funeral wreath in the refrigerator at the back of the store, now paused nearby. "I'll be going along, Mr. Emerson," he announced sadly. "Please be sure that the door is locked when you leave. Good night."

"Good night," answered Russell. "I'll look after everything, sir. By jove, it's six o'clock!"

"Right-o! I must toddle. You coming over?"

A few minutes later, having put out the lights and securely locked the door, Russell fell in beside

Jimmy and the two went briskly off toward the Green. Jimmy was whistling again, but now he had quite forgotten his great sorrow and the sounds he made no longer disguised a crushed spirit and a broken heart. At the corner of State street Russell broke in on the melody.

"Austen, I wish you'd do something for me," he said.

"Name it," answered Jimmy promptly. "Hang you, keep still!"

The latter part of the remark was addressed to the parcel he carried, which was earnestly striving to distribute its contents along the way.

"I want to—I want some advice," continued Russell.

"In that case you've come to the right person, Emerson. I'm famous for my advice. What's the problem?"

Thereupon Russell told about Steve Gaston's visit and the resulting complications. "Now," ended Russell, "do you think I ought to go back to the team, Austen?"

"Hm," said Jimmy. "Well, I don't just see how you can, you know!"

"But that isn't it. *Ought* I to? Is it my duty to—to the School?"

Jimmy was silent for nearly half the block. Then: "Well, if you want my perfectly honest opinion, Emerson," he said, "I think it's every fellow's duty to do what he can for the old A. A.

If you can play a fair line of football and Steve needs you—" He stopped. "Still, there's this store. I don't believe any fellow could find fault with you if—well, if you didn't play, Emerson. At least—" Then his voice dwindled again.

"Just the same," persisted Russell, "you *do* think it's my duty to, don't you?"

"Except for the store—"

"Leave the store out of it, please, Austen."

"Oh, well, in that case," said Jimmy relievedly, "absolutely yes. Maybe I'm a little nutty on the subject, Emerson, but I never could stand fellows who weren't willing to pitch in and do their blamedest for their school or their college or—or their country. Maybe I'm sort of sentimental, but that's the way I feel. I hate a quitter. Not that you'd be that, of course, under the circumstances—"

"I guess, though, I would be," said Russell thoughtfully. "Well, that's settled then."

"Meaning you'll go back on the second? What about the store, though. Hang it, Emerson, you'd better not take my say-so. Leave it to some one else. Put it up to—to—I tell you! Have a talk with Mr. Kincaid. He's a good old scout and has a fine bean on him!"

But Russell shook his head. "I'd rather have your idea than any of the faculty's, Austen. I mean, it's the way the fellows look at it that interests me. You're right, and Gaston was right,

and I'm sure of it." Then he smiled ruefully in the twilight. "I wish, though," he added, "I didn't have to convince Stick!"

"Stick? Oh, Patterson: yes, I see. He won't like it, eh? Look here, Emerson, why shouldn't he take over the store afternoons? He's got his money in it, the silly ass. Doesn't want to lose it, does he? Well, it seems to me it would be just common horse sense for him to—to leap into the breeches—I should say breach, eh?"

"He won't though. He's—well, he's pretty fairly obstinate. He doesn't want to lose his money, no, but he says he won't keep store afternoons and I know him well enough by this time to be mighty certain that he won't!"

"Silly ass!" commented Jimmy as they reached the front of Academy Hall and the parting of their ways.

"I'm awfully much obliged to you," said Russell. "You've been mighty friendly, Austen. I'll be around to-morrow night if you're quite certain you want to go to all that—"

"Wait a second!" interrupted the other, hunching the dilapidated parcel further under his arm with a thoughtful frown. "Look here, old son, I've got an idea. At least, I think I have. I've got something, anyhow. Would this Stick fellow be willing to stay in the store afternoons if he didn't have to go there at all in the mornings?"

"Why, yes, I think he would. I'm sure he

would. But, you see, the trouble is that he has to be there mornings, too. I have recitations—"

"*A bas les* recitations!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Listen! Suppose you could get some one to stick around the shop in the morning when you couldn't. Wouldn't old Stick be willing to put in the afternoon there?"

"Yes, but we'd have to pay some one, and—just now—"

"Not necessarily. At least, not much. Say—say twenty-five cents a week. Would twenty-five cents a week seem unreasonable? Then let us say fifteen—ten—five!"

"We might pay that much," laughed Russell mirthlessly, "but just where could we find any one who'd come for that?"

"Where?" Jimmy struck an attitude intended to be heroic but which was somewhat marred by the sudden collapse of the parcel under one arm. A carton of crackers, a box of caramels, six oranges and two unidentified articles descended to the flagging. When the oranges had been chased down and recovered and the wreckage stowed into various of Jimmy's pockets the latter took up the conversation where it had been so rudely interrupted.

"You asked where you were to find this—this paragon of industry, Emerson. In response I say to you: Look! Behold! He is before you!"

"Eh?" faltered Russell. "You? You mean—"

"Who else? Here am I with most of my mornings wasted. Of course, I kick the jovial football into the empyrean, but there are other times for that. Besides, I am convinced that I shall never cause Charley Brickley to faint with envy! When Mart picked me to become a punter he picked a most acidulous lime! But that aside and, as it were, apart, Emerson. I have always had a sneaking desire to sell things over a counter, and here's my opportunity. You wouldn't want me to do it for nothing. Your pride would rebel. So I insist on a salary, a salary of, shall we say, ten cents a week."

"You're—you're fooling," said Russell dubiously.

"Nary a fool! Come on, do I get the job? Let me remind you, Emerson, that time is fleeting and my inner man cries for sustenance. Also, doubtless, Stan is pacing the room like a caged lion. If the salary asked is too steep, why, I'll compromise. We'll say five cents; but I won't come down another nickel!"

"Why—why—" stammered Russell.

"Agreed then! I'm a wage-earner at last! I'll drop around later and we'll sign the contract. So long!"

And Jimmy waved gayly and sprinted for Lykes.

## CHAPTER X

### JIMMY CONSPIRES

True to his word, Jimmy arrived at Number 27 Upton shortly after supper. Stick, to whom Russell had imparted the proposed solution of the problem, was not present. Stick had succinctly declared that Russell was crazy and that he refused to listen to any more of his ravings. He had not, however, refused to keep store in the afternoon in return for having his mornings free, and that was the principal thing.

Jimmy declared that he had feared Russell might change his mind about employing him and so leave him jobless in the face of a long and cruel winter, and consequently he had hurried right up so soon as he had satisfied the inner man. He had brought his schedule and when Russell had produced his they leaned over the two cards and, as Jimmy phrased it, doped out a course of action. On the whole, Russell's hours and Jimmy's seldom interfered, and there were but two mornings when for more than sixty minutes the store would have to be left to Mr. J. Warren Pulsifer's care.

"Corking!" declared Jimmy. "I'll go down Monday morning with you and you can show me where things are and all that. Something tells me,

Emerson, that I was born to be a merchant, and Heaven help any poor guy that steps his foot inside that store while I'm there. He will either have to buy something or fight me!"

"Better try peaceful means first," suggested Russell, smiling.

"Oh, yes, I shan't insist on trouble. By the way, are there any punching-bags in stock? It might be well for me to keep in trim. Let's see, how do you do it?" Jimmy rubbed his hands and bowed to Russell. "Good morning, sir. Nice weather we're having, are they not? Tennis balls? Certainly. Right this way, please, to the tennis department. Here you are, sir, the finest ball on the market. Used exclusively by the Prince of Wales, Lloyd George and all the best players. Covered with the most expensive Peruvian broadcloth. Every ball filled with two thousand atmospheres of balloon gas, making it the lightest and liveliest ball on the market. As I might say, sir, it's bound to bound. We are making a special price on them this year, eighty cents apiece or five dollars a half-dozen. If you take six dozen we include a high-grade racket. With a gross we give you, absolutely without charge, a receipt for making indelible ink. Half a dozen? Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. Shall I wrap them up or will you take them with you?"

"Aren't you mixed on your prices a little?" laughed Russell.

"Possibly." Jimmy waved carelessly. "I never was good at arithmetic. By the way, you haven't a cash register, have you? No? That's good. I'd never be a success as a salesman where there was one of those things to keep tabs on me!"

"Austen," asked Russell, sobering, "what are you doing this for?"

"This? Oh, you mean *this*. We-ell—" Jimmy blinked. "I don't know, Russell. I thought it was because I liked your—your pep and wanted to help you out. But I'm not sure that it isn't really because I want a lark!"

"Well, it's mighty decent of you, anyway," replied Russell. "It gets me out of a hole. You see, I like football, Austen, even if I'm not very much good at it, and it was sort of hard not to play this fall. Still, I wouldn't have thought of doing it if Gaston hadn't got after me. Now I'm wondering whether I'm going to play because I think it's my duty to or just because I really want to!"

"Jove," said Jimmy, "you've got a regular Puritan conscience, Emerson! What's it matter? The main thing is that you're going to. Now sit down and tell me about things at the store. You give a discount to our chaps, don't you? Well, how about high school students?"

"Just the same," said Russell. "I thought we'd better. They might get sore if we didn't."

"I see. Still, I don't believe Crocker does."

"All the more reason why we should, then, Austen."

"Yes, but— Say, cut out that 'Austen' stuff, won't you? My name's Jimmy."

"And mine's Russell," replied the other, smiling. "More often just Rus."

"I get you! Though, of course," Jimmy added, "when I am on duty I shall call you Mr. Emerson!"

Half an hour later Jimmy paused at the door to say: "Oh, by the way, about to-morrow night."

"That's all right," replied Russell quickly. "It doesn't matter."

"Eh? What doesn't matter?" asked Jimmy, puzzled.

"Why, I mean," floundered Russell, "if it isn't convenient—"

"Rot! What I was about to say was that I think it'll be best not to be too raw, if you see what I mean. We'll use tact and diplomacy, old son. You just happen in and we'll have a social little talk, the lot of us, and after awhile I'll accidentally bring up the subject of the store. You leave it to me. Better not let those guys suspect that we're putting up a game on 'em, eh? Well, so long, Rus. Drop in about seven-thirty or a quarter to eight."

Stick, when he returned to the room later, was in a much better humor than when he had left. He had, it developed, won two straight games

of billiards from another chap over in Haylow. Russell listened with flattering attention to Stick's dramatic narrative of the contests, thereby increasing the latter's content. At last, Stick tore himself from the engrossing subject, frowned slightly and asked: "Well, did you and Austen fix it up?"

Russell explained the arrangements. "That'll give you every morning free except Saturday, Stick. Saturday Austen won't be able to be there, and I have a nine o'clock and an eleven. In the afternoons, except Tuesdays— Here, this is the schedule. I tend store every afternoon except Tuesday from one to three. You come on at three and stay until six. Or, five-thirty, if you like. I'll be down every day right after practice and I ought to get there by half-past. How is that?"

"All right, I guess," replied Stick slowly, looking over the schedule rather as though he suspected that something was being put over on him. "Of course, afternoon's likely to be the busy part of the day, if things ever get busy, that is!"

"I know, but you won't have so much to do that it'll wear you out," answered Russell.

"It doesn't look like it," agreed Stick plaintively. "Say, we're going to lose our money as sure as shooting, Rus!"

"I don't think so," answered the other with more confidence than he felt. "We can't lose it all, anyhow, Stick. We haven't signed any lease

and we can give up the place at a month's notice. We can return most of our stock, too."

"Yes, but we'll be out two months' rent at the very least, and we've sunk about a hundred in rent and advertising and dolling the place up. Pulsifer won't allow us anything for the paint and varnish and work we put in there, I suppose."

"No, we're bound to lose something, of course, if we have to quit," acknowledged Russell. "But I don't believe we'll have to, Stick. Something tells me that things are going to pick up pretty soon."

"I wish something would tell me so," said Stick mournfully. "I don't mind saying, Rus, that I'm plaguey sorry I went into it!"

"Well, don't let's give up the ship yet," replied the other patiently. "Toss me that Latin book over here, will you?"

"What I don't see," went on Stick, complying, "is what this fellow Austen gets out of it. I suppose he's—well, square, eh?"

"Of course he is," answered Russell indignantly.

"Well, don't get waxy. How do I know? What's he going to tend the store for without pay, then?"

"He's not. He's on salary."

"*What?*" almost shrieked Stick. "You mean we're going to pay him money?"

Russell nodded, enjoying Stick's consternation.

"I won't do it!" cried the other. "No, sir! Why, hang it, Rus, we can't afford it!"

"Oh, yes, we can," answered Russell soothingly. "It's only ten cents a week!"

"Ten cents! Ten cents a—" Stick stared blankly. "Is he crazy? What's he want ten cents for? Why doesn't he do it for nothing?"

"Well, he told me that he wanted to be a wage-earner," explained Russell gravely.

Stick viewed him suspiciously. "It's mighty funny," he grunted. "The whole business is mighty funny. You and Austen are up to something, I'll bet. All right, but just let me tell you that I'm not paying out my money to him!"

"You don't mind five cents a week, do you?" asked Russell, grinning.

"No, I'll pay five cents, all right, but I won't pay a penny more. I've lost enough already in the fool business!" And Stick pulled a book to him savagely and intimated that he was through with the subject.

Russell found not only the hockey and basket ball captains in Number 4 Lykes Hall the next evening, but Cal Grainger. These, with Stanley, Jimmy and Russell, quite filled the room. Afterwards, Russell learned from Jimmy that Cal's appearance was unsolicited and unexpected. Jimmy managed to convey the impression that Russell was a frequent caller, and was aided in the mild deception by Stanley, who had been admitted to

the conspiracy. Russell was aware of the slightly puzzled inspections of the others, but appeared not to be. Bob Coolidge, the hockey team captain, was a tall, slim-bodied senior with a nice smile and a queer way of stuttering when he got the least bit excited. Sid Greenwood was small in comparison, with sharp black eyes, rebellious dark hair and a quick manner of speech and movement. Russell knew them both by sight, just as he knew Cal Grainger, but had never been introduced to them before to-night. He found a seat on a corner of Stanley's bed after the introductions had been performed and helped himself to the caramels that Stanley passed. The talk was concerned with the criminality of the Athletic Committee, and Coolidge stuttered amusingly as he thumped the edge of the window-seat.

"A l-lot of Miss N-N-Nancies," he declared earnestly. "You'd think we were j-just kids, the way they c-c-coddle us! Gosh! Why, look at Kenly! They g-g-got a twelve-game sc-sc-sc-sc—"

"Schedule," prompted Cal kindly.

"—Hedule," went on Coolidge, batting his eyes wildly. "And all we c-c-can get is s-seven games, with a p-p-possibility of eight if we c-c-can p-p-persuade Oak Grove to play here! What kind of a sc-sc—"

"You can't say it, Bob," interposed Greenwood. "Don't try. We know what you mean.

Also, son, we agree with you that the committee is a bunch of old women and that Peghorn is the worst of the lot. I hope he gets his bonnet-strings all knotted up! You can't—"

"Oh, Peg isn't to blame," said Jimmy. "He's no worse than the rest. What we need here is a student council or something to talk turkey to those antediluvian birds. How many games do you fellows get away, Sid?"

"Four," replied the basket ball leader scornfully.

"Well, that's one more than we get," said Jimmy.

"Sure, but it's different—"

"Taking a football team around's not at all the same," broke in Cal. "You have to have thirty or more fellows and half a dozen coaches and trainers and nurses—"

"Quite different," agreed Coolidge, eagerly. "We take ten or eleven f-f-fellows, and it d-d-doesn't c-cost us anything to speak of, and we get home early—"

"Having lost the game," interpolated Cal, unkindly.

"Sh-sh-shut up! S-s-same with the b-b-basket ball outfit, too. S-s-seven or eight men and n-no expense—"

Russell lost the rest, for just there, under cover of the conversation, Stanley addressed him. "I

hear you're on the second football team, Emerson," he said.

"I'm going out to-morrow," answered Russell.

"Yes, Jimmy was telling me. I guess Steve Gaston's going to work up a rip-snorting outfit, if what I hear is right. Great fellow, Steve. Hard luck, his not being able to play this year. What's your position?"

"I played end last year. Gaston wants me to try for it again."

"How's the store getting along? Doing pretty well?"

## CHAPTER XI

### FAIR PROMISES

Russell was spared an answer, for just then Jimmy appealed to him. "That's right, isn't it, Rus? If it wasn't for football these fellows would be prying up asphalt or laying sewer pipes, wouldn't they? We have to earn money to keep their old hockey teams and basket ball teams going. Yes, and pay for the crew and the baseball nine, too!"

"Not by a long shot," exclaimed Cal. "Leave the Nine out of it, Jimmy. We've paid our own way for many a season, old scout!"

"Pooh! Made expenses, maybe, but you generally have to come a-borrowing from the old sock every spring."

"Well, we pay it back, son."

"You fellows have to have too many bats and gloves and fancy fixings," continued Jimmy. "And you wear too good clothes, too. I'll bet it costs you a fortune to outfit every spring, and—"

"Listen to him!" exploded Cal. "Great Guns, what does it cost to run a football team?"

"That's different," laughed Jimmy. "A football team's worth while, Cal. Besides, when it comes to that, those uniforms you fellows wear cost more than a football suit, I'll bet."

"Rot!"

"Well, what do they cost? Come on, now. Let's hear."

"I don't know, you idiot. We get 'em by the bunch. Maybe eight dollars, maybe nine."

"Can you beat that?" Jimmy appealed to the company. "Captain of the Nine and doesn't know what his uniforms cost him!"

"That's not my business, you chump. That's up to the managers. I've got enough to look after—"

"Well, here's a fellow can tell us." Jimmy turned to Russell. "What do those uniforms cost, Rus, per uniform? You ought to know."

Russell smiled and shook his head. "I'm afraid I don't. You can pay almost any price for a three-piece uniform, from six dollars up to twelve. It depends on how many you buy, of course, and on quality, too."

"Are you an authority on the subject, Emerson?" asked Greenwood.

Russell shook his head. "No, not at all," he answered.

"You're an awful bluffer, Jimmy," laughed Cal.

"Not a bit," denied Jimmy stoutly. "Rus sells uniforms and he ought to know the prices of 'em better than we do. It's his busi—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Cal. "You're the Emerson who has the store on West street! Of course! I missed that. Yes, you must know something about

baseball togs. Football togs, too, eh? Well, tell us, then, which outfit costs the most, Emerson."

"Football," answered Russell, smiling. "There's more wool. Football togs have to be better because they get harder use."

"There you are!" exclaimed Cal, in triumph. Russell noted that Coolidge and Greenwood were observing him with new interest.

"I still maintain," said Jimmy, with great dignity, "that one of the suits you fellows wear costs more than my football outfit. I got my jersey for nothing, from a chap who was leaving school—"

"It looks it," breathed Coolidge.

"That's not the point," said Cal. "Every one knows you're such a miser you wouldn't *buy* anything. We were discussing new uniforms, and Emerson says himself—"

"Say, Emerson, what's a hockey shirt w-worth?" asked Bob Coolidge.

"I can't say. We haven't stocked any yet. I'll find out for you, though, if you want me to."

Coolidge shook his head. "Thanks, no, it doesn't matter. I just wondered."

"Bet you Rus can sell you shirts and whole outfits, too, for that matter, less than you paid for them last year," announced Jimmy. "You fellows always get stuck when you send to New York."

"It's not my funeral," said Greenwood, with a shrug. "Let the manager worry."

Coolidge, however, seemed impressed. "I don't know about that, B-B-Bob," he said earnestly. "We'd ought to get th-th-things as cheap as p-p-p-possible."

"You ought, but you don't," jeered Jimmy. "You pay any price you're asked, and then go broke before the end of the season and have to dig into the old Ath. Com. stocking. Say, why don't you give Emerson a chance this year? Let him bid on the stuff. Might as well hand the profit to one of our own crowd as send it on to some guy you don't know in New York. That applies to you, too, Cal."

Cal pursed his lips. "Why, we usually buy a goodish lot, Jimmy; new uniforms all through, bats, balls, a raft of stuff; I'm afraid Emerson couldn't handle our business."

"Why couldn't he?" demanded Jimmy. "Of course he could, you chump! Besides, the uniforms would fit a blamed sight better than they did last year if he took the fellows' measurements. This thing of sending the size of your waist and the number collar you wear and expecting to get a decently fitting suit gets my goat! And as for your bats and all the other lumber you have to have to play your absurd game, why, Emerson could sell you those better and cheaper than the New York folks, I'll bet. Besides, you could see

what you were getting, which is something you don't do now."

"Well, I'm not throwing off on Emerson," replied Cal, throwing a kindly glance toward that youth, "but, unless I'm mistaken, Jimmy, they tried getting their outfits here in town several years ago and it didn't work. If I were—"

"Course it didn't work," interrupted Jimmy scornfully. "They went to Crocker's. Every fellow knows that Crocker's stuff is punk. I mean his sporting goods. Maybe he keeps good nails and—"

"I bought a fielder's glove there last spring," began Stanley eagerly. But Cal groaned and Jimmy threatened his roommate with the empty candy box.

"I oughtn't to have introduced the subject," continued Jimmy sadly. "I might have known Stan would try to tell about his old glove—"

"'Old' is right," muttered Stanley gloomily.

"I th-th-think Jimmy's right," declared Coolidge. "No reason why we sh-sh-shouldn't pat-pat-pat—"

"Stop talking Irish, Bob," said Greenwood. "Are you going to have basket ball stuff, Emerson?"

"Yes, we'll have a pretty complete line by the first of December, or a little before. I'd like to have you come in and let me show you, Greenwood. We're agent here for the Proctor and Farnham

Company, and their basket balls are certainly corkers."

"Never heard of them," said Sid Greenwood unenthusiastically. "We've always used—"

"He's got the other makes, too," assured Jimmy. "But if those P. and F. folks make as good a basket ball as they do a football, I advise you to tie to them. I'll bet even you could shoot a basket with one of those balls, Sid!"

Greenwood grinned. "I'd surely like to see one of them," he said. "I'll drop around some time, Emerson, and have a talk. Of course, it's the manager's place to do the buying, but I dare say I could get him to consider your stuff. There's no special reason, so far as I can see, for sending to New York for things if we can get them just as good in town."

"Say," said Stanley, after a long silence, "why not start a Home Consumption League, if that's what they're called? We fellows represent four of the school sports, and here's Emerson and his pal trying to make a little coin out of a store in the village that sells just the stuff we buy. Let's see if we can't—can't head some trade his way. What do you say? It took pluck to start that store, I guess, and we all like pluck. Seems to me he deserves to win out. And he can't fail to if he gets the school trade. Of course, there wouldn't be any favoritism about it. He'd have to make as good prices as New York, and sell as

good stuff, but I dare say he could do it, eh, Emerson?"

Thus appealed to, Russell nodded, smiling rather seriously. "I'm quite sure we can supply just as good stuff, including uniforms, as can be bought in New York, and I think we can sell a little cheaper. How much cheaper I don't know now, but enough to be worth considering, I'd say. Besides that, there'd be no express to pay, for I'd deliver the goods right to you."

"S-s-sounds reasonable," declared Coolidge.

"And," continued Russell, "I don't need to tell you fellows that if we had the job of outfitting some of the teams we'd be certain of making a go of that business. We don't ask any favors, or expect any, but I guess we can prove that we can sell just as high quality goods and just as cheaply as any New York house can. We'd be mighty glad of a chance, anyway."

"F-f-fair enough," exclaimed Coolidge. "Far as I'm c-c-concerned—"

"Look here, Jimmy," said Cal, prodding that youth to attention with his shoe, "did you get us here to—to work this scheme for Emerson?"

"Get you here!" replied Jimmy indignantly. "Why, you poor fish, who asked you around, anyway?"

"Well, Bob and Sid, then. I know you didn't say anything to me about it. But I suspect—"

"Go on and suspect," said Jimmy, virtuously.

"I had no idea that you were coming here this evening. If you don't believe that—"

"You asked me, though," said Greenwood, grinning.

"M-m-me, too," said Coolidge. "Not that I m-m-mind, because—"

"Oh, well, I don't mind fessing up," Jimmy broke in, "now that you fellows have taken the bait. I did ask Sid and Bob—Rus, too, of course with the notion of getting something started. Your arrival, Cal, was as unforeseen as—er—pleasing. There's nothing to apologize for. Rus is a good sort and needs to make a success of that store over there. We can help him. So let's do it. Any objections?"

"Of course not," said Cal, laughing. "I'll do what I can to steer some business to him. I don't make any promises, for our management have been buying in New York for some time and aren't likely to make a change. Still, I'll do my best."

"We don't buy much new stuff," said Sid Greenwood, "but I guess I can promise Emerson that he shall have what trade there is."

"Thanks," murmured Russell. He was finding the situation just a bit embarrassing in spite of the evident good-will of the fellows.

"And that g-g-goes for me, too," announced Coolidge earnestly. "I'll see Nagle to-morrow and b-b-bully him into g-g-giving you a ch-ch-ch—"

"Spoken like a man, Bob!" said Jimmy warmly.

"Your speech is halting, but the spirit that prompts your words—"

"Go to th-th-thunder!" grunted Coolidge.

"The Home Market Club is organized," announced Stanley, yawning.

"It was a Home Consumption League awhile back," objected Greenwood. "But never mind. The motto is: Patronize Home Industries! Emerson, I hope your place will do well and make you a rich man; as rich as Jimmy!"

"And m-m-more generous," supplemented Coolidge. "A f-f-fellow who offers one box of c-c-caramels to a mob like this is a p-p-p—"

"Introducing Mr. Robert Coolidge, gentlemen, with his famous imitation of a flivver working on one cylinder. Gentlemen, Mr. Coolidge!" And Jimmy clapped loudly.

"—p-p-p-piker!" ended Coolidge triumphantly.

Whereupon the assemblage broke up, greatly aided by a tussle between Jimmy and the hockey captain. Russell left with the others, parting with Cal at the stairs and with the others outside, since both Greenwood and Coolidge lived in Haylow. "Glad to have met you, Emerson," said the basket ball leader affably. "I'm coming into your place some day soon and see what you've got there. Good night."

A somewhat unintelligible utterance from Coolidge followed and Russell went his way. Of course, reason told him, nothing might come of

those fair promises, but he couldn't help feeling elated and encouraged, and even when, reaching Number 27 Upton, he unfolded the tale of the astounding success of the evening to Stick and was met with gloomy pessimism his elation was not much subdued. Stick was like that, he reflected, and climbed into bed to lie awake a long while in the darkness and vision rosy dreams. His last conscious reflection ere he finally fell asleep was that Jimmy Austen was certainly a corking chap!

## CHAPTER XII

### BACK IN HARNESS

JIMMY was at the store in the morning and Russell went over the stock with him, explaining cost marks and various other matters that should form part of a clerk's knowledge. Jimmy was, for once, not in the least flippant, and Stick, when he finally appeared to release Russell for a recitation, appeared to view the new employee more leniently than Russell had dared hope he might. Jimmy's duties were not to begin until the morrow, and presently he and Russell hurried back to the Academy together.

"Your friend Stick seems rather a Gloomy Gus," observed Jimmy on the way, "but perhaps by kindness and forbearance we may cheer him up. Is he taking the afternoon watch to-day, Rus?"

"Yes, I'm going back after this class, and he's going to stay from three to five-thirty. Stick's not a bad sort, but he doesn't put his best foot forward very often."

"I didn't think to notice his feet," replied Jimmy thoughtfully. "Well, here's where we part. Oh, by the way, what about my attire? Do you think I ought to—well, dress for the part to-

morrow? Something, say, a trifle modish, eh? Gray trousers and frock-coat, maybe, with a lavender tie and a single black pearl in it. Or do you think the usual more negligent dress would answer?"

"I'd go in for simplicity," answered Russell, grinning. "What you have on looks all right. Besides, customers might think you bought those knickers in the store, and that would be quite an advertisement, eh?"

"Right-o! Well, see you this afternoon, doubtless. So long, Mister Employer!"

There was nothing very dramatic about Russell's return to the football fold. A hurried and curt-spoken Gaston welcomed him with a sudden smile and a brief congratulatory nod. "Fine, Emerson!" he called as he passed. "B Squad for you."

Followed half an hour's work that proved to Russell very conclusively that he was in no good shape for the task ahead of him. He had lost a fortnight's training and the fact was evident. Long before signal drill was done he was aching in most of his muscles and puffing like a grampus. He was glad indeed of a short respite on the bench before the squad walked across to the first team gridiron, where, although the time for scrimmage had arrived, a squad under leadership of Ned Richards was still hustling down the field, Ned's voice, sharply imperative, rising above the tones

of Coach Cade and Captain Proctor, trailing behind and rapping out criticism. That bunch, reflected Russell as he paused with his companions to form a sweatered and blanketed group along the edge of the field, was the first team's A Squad, although there were two players on it whose presence surprised him. These were Crocker, at left end in place of Lake, and Greenwood, at fullback. Joe Greenwood was Sid's brother, a heavy, dark-complexioned youth who had played with Russell on last year's second. Russell hadn't thought him varsity material, but he was displacing the veteran Browne. Possibly, though, Browne was on the hospital list or in trouble at the Office: Russell hadn't been following football very closely.

The rest of the squad were first-string men: Butler, playing at left tackle for Captain Mart Proctor, Rowlandson, Nichols, Stimson, Putney, McLeod, Richards, Harmon, Moncks. Across the sunlit field, the substitute's bench showed far fewer huddled forms than had sat there last week, indicating that the first cut had taken effect. In the stands a score or so of onlookers were scattered, their hands more often than not thrust deeply in their pockets, for the afternoon was chill in spite of the flood of late sunlight. Captain Proctor detached himself from the followers behind the squad as it trotted past down the center of the gridiron and cupped his hands.

"Yes," said Russell faintly. "I'm—fearfully—soft!"

"Ready for you in five minutes, Gaston!" he called. "Help yourself to the field, will you?"

Steve Gaston nodded and tossed a ball to the turf. "Pass it around," he ordered crisply, "and keep moving."

So the second team players strung out along the edge of the gridiron in two roughly formed ranks and, walking briskly, shot the ball from one to another, frequently tripping over a trailing blanket when the pigskin eluded them and bobbed across the turf. Finally there was the hoarse squawking of a horn and Manager Johnson was signaling them. Two sweatered substitutes were unsnarling the chain. From the stand came a rat-a-tat of chilling feet against the boards.

"Second team's ball," announced Coach Cade through his small megaphone. "We'll take this goal!"

"Yah," derided the scrub's captain sotto-voce as he pranced about, limbering his legs, "why don't you let us toss for it, Tightwad?" Russell grinned as his glance met Falls'. "They haven't kicked off to us for a week," the captain added ruefully, yet smiling. "Come on, fellows! Let's take it away from them!"

"You take right end, Emerson," ordered Coach Gaston. "Look out for Harmon on forward passes, boy. All right, Second! Go to it! You fellows who aren't playing, keep your blankets on.

You'll be wanted before this ruckus is through."

The second lined up across the field for the kick-off, a whistle shrilled and big Jim Newton, center, lifted the ball well toward the first team's goal. Russell, following down under the kick, scanning warily the hastily forming enemy interference, told himself that it was good to feel the sod underfoot again, to hear the soft rasp of canvas and creak of leather. Then he was swinging on a heel to dash across the field toward where Moncks, the pigskin clutched tightly, was coming along behind his interference. It was not Russell who stopped Moncks, but Captain Falls. The best Russell could do was topple Richards, in doing which he got a fine rap on the side of his head that, partly broken by the edge of his helmet, was yet hard enough to make his senses swim for a moment. When he got unsteadily to his feet again the teams were lining up near the thirty-five-yard line. Behind each team was its coach, and their voices were already to be heard. Russell, skirting the first team line to his position, saw that Captain Proctor was at his place again. Then Ned Richards yelped the signal, the lines swayed, met, there were gasps and grunts, an angry, stifled exclamation from Wells, the scrub's right tackle, a hoarse bellow from Falls, and Harmon was crashing out of the welter of brown canvas bodies. Russell, playing out and back, sprang in, eluded the savage spring of an interferer and got his

man, aided by Reilly, a half. But Harmon was hard to stop, and both tacklers gave ground for another yard ere the runner was down. Russell, blocking with one knee Harmon's attempt to thrust the ball forward, muttered: "No, you don't!" Then the whistle piped just as reënforcements plunged down on the group. Harmon had made four yards outside Wells, and Wells was mad. He muttered aloud as he crouched with swaying arms at the end of the line, and Russell caught his threatening, taunting words.

"Come on! Try that again, you big stiff! I'll put that long nose of yours on the blink for keeps! Send it this way, Ned! Come on, you Sore-Heads! Oh, you would, eh?"

This latter remark was to Mart Proctor, who had feinted inside Wells as the ball was snapped. There was an ecstatic moment for Wells, and then Mart deposited him neatly against his guard and tore outside him. Russell, already crossing behind the backs, left the invader to Reilly and met the play which was coming through left tackle. It was Greenwood this time, and the full-back added another three yards to the total. On the next attempt there was a fumble by Moncks, recovered by Richards for a yard loss. Then first team punted, Richards dropping the ball in Goodwin's arms on the scrub's twenty-yard line and the left half reeling off seven strides before he was downed by Crocker.

Carpenter, the scrub quarter, made two on a wide run and then Reilly, red-headed and hard-fighting, squirmed through Rowlandson for three more. But that ended the advance and Kendall punted well into enemy territory. First gained three on a criss-cross, Harmon carrying, and then Richards passed diagonally across the line to McLeod, and the latter, catching the heave unchallenged, went half-way to second's goal before Carpenter stopped him. Play was held up while first team and second team coaches criticized and instructed, and while Russell, his last breath about gone, sat on the ground and longed for the horn to sound the end of the period. Then he was up again, almost on his fifteen-yard line, set for a forward pass that didn't materialize. Harmon carried past Wells once more and fought and squirmed to the scrub's twenty-one. Falls went down the crouching line and slapped perspiring backs and implored his men to hold, and Gaston, deep-voiced, shouted to Goodwin to close in and watch that guard! Then came the play again, and, over the heads of his plunging team-mates, Russell saw Richards, ball in hand, trotting back and back, saw Harmon sneaking fast across the turf to the left, saw Squibbs dash headlong at Richards, saw the latter side-step, calmly, smilingly, and saw the right arm go back for the long throw. All about him were warning voices as he

forced his tired legs and tuckered lungs to new exertion.

*"Pass! Watch that man! Stop that throw!"*

Russell, running, glanced back. Overhead was the ball, a dozen yards ahead was Harmon, walking sidewise, hands ready. Behind Russell streamed the field, coming fast but too late to get into the play. Carpenter was closing up the gap between his position and the side line. Russell called on his flagging strength for one last supreme effort. Harmon had stopped, was facing the descending ball, had raised his arms. Russell was still a good six yards distant and he knew that Harmon would be off before he could reach him. There was but one chance and he took it. Throwing his arms high, he leaped into the air, hoping against hope. But fortune was with him. The flying pigskin grazed his left hand. The touch of it was so light that Russell scarcely felt it, but it served to deflect the ball. Harmon swayed to the right, the ball spurned his eager grasp and went trickling, bouncing across the turf toward the side line. Russell paid no further attention to it. He eased himself gently to the ground and turned onto his back. A minute later Lawrence pulled him to his feet and put a strong arm under his shoulders.

"Good work, Emerson," he panted. "Better step out. Gaston's looking. All right now?"

"Yes," said Russell faintly. "I'm—fearfully —soft!"

They made their way back to the forming line-up, but Coach Gaston intervened. "That'll do, Emerson," he called. Then, turning to the far side of the field, "Tierney!" he bawled. "Tierney! Hurry up!"

Russell yielded his helmet and went off with drooping head. He was heartily ashamed of himself. He had lasted some eight minutes only! Of course the reason wasn't far to seek: a fellow can't play football if he isn't conditioned; and Russell realized that he was very far from conditioned. A summer spent largely indoors hadn't, he thought ruefully, prepared him very well for what was before him. He sank down in the line of waiting substitutes and wondered if he would ever get his breath fully back again!

Of course first team went over. Having reached the twenty yard line, it wasn't to be held by anything the second had to offer in the way of argument. Moncks got a good gain through center and Harmon made it first down on the scrub's sixteen. From there, using concealed plays, the first wore down the defense until, on fourth down, with the ball on the five yards, Richards faked a forward and passed to Moncks and the latter raced around the second's left for a touchdown. The period ended soon after and the second team players joined the substitutes and huddled into blankets

and listened to a grave discourse on their shortcomings and failures from the coach.

When the second period started Steve Gaston put on almost a new eleven. Russell didn't go in again, but sat on the turf, wrapped in a faded gray blanket, and saw Tierney play right end. And Tierney did very well, Russell thought, even if he did let Harmon get safely off with another forward pass that paved the way for the first team's second score. For that matter, Russell had almost done the same thing himself. He was still wondering why he had been caught flat-footed on that play!

Coach Cade likewise called on his second-string players for the last period, and on his third-string as well. Russell saw with satisfaction that when Jimmy Austen supplanted Mawson at left half—Harmon had not started the last period—his punting, if not in the least phenomenal, was very good. Russell got a case of mild heart-failure every time the ball went to Jimmy for travel by the aerial route, for Jimmy was deliberate to a fault. It looked as though he simply hated to part from that ball until at least two of the enemy were almost upon him. But he had Fortune with him today, and of his four punts not one was blocked and each went its way as he fore-ordained it to; forty yards, forty-five and, once, a magnificent fifty-odd. At carrying the ball, though, Jimmy met with less success, and after each of his several

attempts Russell heard the incisive voice of the coach dealing out rebuke.

Second didn't score that afternoon, didn't approach to scoring, indeed, and, afterwards, Steve Gaston's quiet thoughtfulness indicated that he wasn't any too well pleased. Steve had yanked Squibbs and Emerson back to the fold and added two other unknown quantities in the persons of a brace of sophomores who had messed about with last year's freshman team. So far, so good, but the second team was still far from the hard-fighting, bull-dog aggregation that he was working for. He told himself that the weight was there, and the aggressiveness, and the knowledge sufficient for his ends, but that for some reason the fellows weren't using them. He wondered if there was some way in which to make the team forget that they were doing battle with their fellows and really fight! Of the crowd, Wells was the only one who exhibited the proper spirit. When Wells went into action friendship ceased. Put Wells in football togs and he would have fought to a finish with his grandmother! Sometimes Steve had to call the tackle down for "slanging" too much, but he always hated to do it. If he could only get the rest of the team into the same frame of mind he would, he felt, have a real eleven, an eleven that would make history.

On the way out of the gymnasium he caught sight of Russell and hailed him. "I used you a

bit hard this afternoon, Emerson," he said, "but I wanted to see how you showed up, and there isn't much time for coddling."

"I'm afraid I showed up pretty poorly," said Russell. "I had no idea a fellow could go stale so soon, Gaston."

"I know." Gaston nodded. "You were all right, though. Get some one to work out the kinks in your muscles to-night. A good hot bath will help, if you get right into bed afterwards. I'll let you off easy to-morrow. How did the team strike you?"

Russell hesitated, for it hadn't occurred to him before to consider that subject. "Pretty fair," he said at last. "It's early yet."

"It's never early when it comes to getting a team in shape," responded the coach. "I've got the stuff there, Emerson, but I don't get it out. I will, though, by ginger! I'm going to make that bunch deliver the goods. Well, good night. Take care of yourself."

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE NEW ASSISTANT

"If I only had a tin dinner-pail!" reflected Jimmy regretfully as he turned into West street the next morning and caught sight of the gay sign above the doorway of Number 112. His enthusiasm had brought him there at a minute after half-past eight and to his surprise the store was still locked. But Russell had provided him with a key and Jimmy thrust it into the lock with an important air and swung open the creaking door. The place exhaled a stale odor of withered flowers, and Jimmy traversed the long aisle and threw open the rear door as well. From the unwillingness displayed by the bolts he judged that that portal was seldom disturbed. He looked out. There was a diminutive yard there surrounded by a sagging board fence and littered with boxes and rubbish. A gate gave onto a narrow alley beyond which was another fence above whose rim could be seen the trees and white gables and red chimney-tops of the residences on State street. Jimmy went back into the store and looked about him. Through the front door came the morning sun-

light, displaying to his disapproving gaze a very dirty floor.

"Might as well do the thing right," said Jimmy to himself. In a dark corner stood a dilapidated broom. In the back yard he had noted a box half-full of sawdust. Jimmy removed his coat, folded it, placed it beneath the counter alongside the cigar box that did duty as a money drawer for the Sign of the Football, and went to work. A small sink at the back of the store provided water, and Jimmy moistened the sawdust thoroughly and then, starting at the front of the place, sprinkled it lavishly. After that, whistling blithely, he went to work. Now and then he paused to observe a passer or to watch hopefully some one who had paused outside the window. But no one infringed on his solitude; no one, that is, until Jimmy had the sawdust swept nearly to the back door. Then it was Mr. J. Warren Pulsifer who appeared.

He showed no surprise at Jimmy's presence. Perhaps he had overheard the arrangements being made yesterday. But he did show a concern that almost amounted to disapproval. "H'm," he said sadly, viewing the thick windrow of dirty sawdust in front of the boy's broom. "H'm."

"Good morning," responded Jimmy brightly. "Cleaning up a bit, you see, sir."

"Yes. H'm. Well, there's a man comes in to do that the first of the month. Washes the windows, too."

"Whether it's needed or not," said Jimmy innocently.

"Sweeping makes a good deal of dust," continued the other severely.

"Collects a good deal, too,' answered Jimmy, continuing toward the door.

Mr. Pulsifer pretended to be affected by the dust and coughed delicately. "It's bad for the flowers," he said querulously. "I'd rather you didn't do it, my boy."

He coughed again and went back to his wire enclosure. Being called "my boy" grated on Jimmy and he leaned on the handle of his broom and favored Mr. J. Warren Pulsifer with a malignant stare. Then he finished his job, placed the now almost useless broom back in the dim corner, washed his hands, dried them on his breeches for want of other means and started after his coat.

"Please close the back door if you're through," said Mr. Pulsifer drearily. "There's a draft."

Jimmy obeyed. When he had his coat on again he stationed himself behind the small show-case and looked into the street. After a while that occupation palled and he pulled a box down from a shelf and removed the lid. It was empty. So was the next one. So were all boxes in that tier. Jimmy grinned and tried the next pile. He was more fortunate. Three gray sweaters rewarded

him. He took one out, examined it, held it before him and shook his head.

"Too small," he muttered. The others were too small also. He put the garments back and returned the box to its place. Then he surveyed the goods in the window. Raising his eyes, he saw two boys doing the same thing from beyond the glass. They weren't Academy fellows, nor, since the hour was now nine o'clock, could they be high school fellows. Yet they were well dressed and appeared to have plenty of time on their hands. In age they were evidently about sixteen years. Their gazes were set on the tennis racket and they were discussing it seriously. Jimmy could see their lips moving, but could hear no sounds. After a moment he withdrew from sight and went swiftly to the doorway. There he stepped just outside and leaned a shoulder negligently against the frame. The two boys were still admiring and discussing. Jimmy started to whistle, his gaze set across the street on Whitson's Blue Front Pharmacy. The sound drew the boys' attention and at the same instant Jimmy turned his eyes their way. Jimmy had a winning smile, and now he used it. The nearer of the two boys smiled back. The other drew away as though to continue his journey along the street.

"Come on in, fellows, and let me show you some things," invited Jimmy. "I'm looking for something to do."

"We were just—looking," murmured the nearer youth.

"Sure!" responded Jimmy heartily. "Come on inside and look. You don't need to buy anything. Let me show you a tennis racket, maybe, or a sweater." He drew back invitingly. There was low-voiced colloquy and the two followed hesitantly inside. Jimmy reached the back of the counter by the simple expedient of placing one hand thereon and vaulting it. That seemed to put the visitors more at their ease, and one of them laughed and said:

"Say, how much is that tennis racket in the window?"

"That one?" Jimmy reached over the curtain and brought the racket into view, as he did so reading the tag attached to the handle. "Have a slant at it," he invited, handing it to the questioner. "That's a nice racket. One of Proctor and Farnham's. You won't find another one of those in this town." He might have added "or in this store," but he refrained.

"Never heard of that make," said the more reticent boy.

"What?" Jimmy was surprised, but politely so. "One of the best, if not *the* best. Ever see Williams play?"

"I have," assented the first speaker, "but I didn't notice what sort of a racket he used."

"You have a look the next time," advised Jimmy, wondering just what racket Williams did wield. "How do you like the feel of that? Corking balance, eh? That handle gives a nice firm grip, too. I'd like to own that myself." This was no more than the truth, although the desire of possession was but a minute old.

"What did you say the price was?"

"Price? Oh, six-twenty-five. That's a special price, too. You see, we have the agency for the P. and F. goods here and we're selling very low to introduce them. That racket would sell for seven dollars in New York, I suppose."

The boy nodded agreement. "Yes, I dare say it would." He turned to his companion. "I like it better than Carty's," he said, "don't you?"

The second youth took the implement and subjected it to a minute and sustained inspection. Finally he balanced it across a finger. Then he stepped back and swung it mightily through the air, smashing an imaginary ball through the doorway. Then he handed it back, and Jimmy heard plainly the sigh that accompanied the action. The boy nodded soberly but convincingly. "It's a corker," he declared.

The intending purchaser of a racket glowed. It is always satisfying to have one's judgment upheld. He swung the racket himself slowly and looked admiringly at it. At last he laid it on the

counter, and Jimmy's heart fell. "I like it all right," said the youth, "but that's more than I want—more than I meant to pay for one."

"That so? Well, you can't get much of a racket these days for less than six dollars," replied Jimmy. "You fellows know what the fancy ones fetch; eight, nine—more if you want to pay it." Jimmy fondled the tightly-stretched strings admiringly. "That racket would last three hard seasons, I'll bet, without restringing. You don't see finer gut than that very often. I like the way it's reënforced there, too, don't you? That small gut strengthens the racket without making it dead."

The two boys nodded in unison and in silence. Two pairs of eyes were following Jimmy's pointing finger absorbedly. At last: "I can lend you a dollar," said the reticent youth in low tones. The other turned eagerly, then shook his head.

"I oughtn't to pay more than five," he said virtuously but sadly. Jimmy drew a breath of relief. He was, he knew, about to make a sale, his first sale! He drew a caressing hand along the handle, from the black-and-gold diamond trade-mark and the word "Runner-Up" to the soft brown leather band at the end. The tempted one followed the gesture, thrilling to it. Jimmy looked up and spoke at the psychological moment.

"Are you high school fellows?" he asked.

"No."

"Because, if you were, I could give you the regular high school discount of five per cent. That would make it cost you—let me see—yes, five-ninety-four."

"We're Mount Millard fellows," said one of the boys.

Jimmy pricked up his ears at that. "Mount Millard! Is that so? What sort of a football team have you got over there this year?"

"Pretty good, I guess. Not so good as last year's, maybe, but—"

"Hope not!" laughed Jimmy. "You beat us badly last year. How do you fellows happen to be so far from home?" Mount Millard was at Warren, and Warren was some eighteen miles from Alton.

"We came over to go to the dentist's," the boy explained. "There isn't a decent one in Warren."

"Nor anything else," mourned his companion.

"Except the school," said Jimmy smilingly.

"Sure, the school's all right, but there aren't any decent stores there. It's a hole that way."

"Where do your crowd buy your athletic supplies, then?"

"Oh, one of the druggists keeps a few things. Generally he sends away for them."

"How long did it take you to get over here?" Jimmy asked.

"About twenty-five minutes, I guess. We came

in an automobile with a man who lives there. It takes about forty minutes by the trolley."

"Uh-huh," responded Jimmy thoughtfully. "Don't see why you fellows can't do your shopping over here."

"Well, it isn't worth while, I guess. We manage to get most everything we want, one way or another."

"Rackets like this one?" asked Jimmy, smiling.

The boy shook his head, smiling, too.

"Tell you what I'll do," announced Jimmy. "We give a ten per cent discount to Alton fellows and I don't see why we shouldn't give the same to Mount Millard. You may have that racket for five dollars and sixty-two cents. All I ask is that you tell fellows where you bought it and that if they'll take the trouble to come over here—or send over, if they like—we'll treat them white and give them ten per cent discount from the regular price. What do you say?"

The boy hesitated, but the space of that hesitation was so brief as to be almost negligible. "I'll take it!" he said crisply.

When they were gone, hurrying off to their appointment at the nearby dentist's, Jimmy smiled proudly as he took out a pen and began to figure on a piece of wrapping paper. "'b.j.t.,'" he murmured. "That's 6, 5, 0. I was only a quarter of a dollar out of the way. All right. Now, ten per cent off that leaves—let's see—yes, five-

eighty-five." He counted the money on the counter: a five dollar bill and sixty-two cents in change. Then he figured once more. "I owe twenty-three cents," he muttered, and found the amount in his pocket and added it to the sum on the counter. Then he reached beneath for the cigar box and swept the proceeds into it, with an air of intense satisfaction not at all marred by the fact that the sale of the tennis racket, because he had translated the price-tag's inscription erroneously, had cost him personally twenty-three cents!

That transaction satisfactorily completed, Jimmy went, whistling, back to the doorway to again play the rôle of the watchful spider. The tune he whistled evidently did not please Mr. J. Warren Pulsifer who had left his cage and was listlessly arranging a bunch of asparagus fern in the wax-papered bottom of a long card-board box. As he worked he shot impatient, even indignant glances at the unconcerned Jimmy, who, not realizing the pain he was inflicting on the florist's nerves, went heedlessly and blithely on. It is just possible that, even had he realized the discomfort his melody was causing, he would have continued it, for Mr. Pulsifer didn't stand very high with Jimmy.

Others came and looked into the window, some interestedly, some carelessly, and all ultimately passed by. The better part of an hour passed. The sunlight became very warm, and Jimmy

looked longingly across the street toward the screen door of the Blue Front Pharmacy from behind which came the hiss of carbonated water. Jimmy wanted a cooling drink very much. But duty held him sternly at his post. If, he warned himself, he were to cross the street even for a scant three minutes some one might enter the store in his brief absence and, finding none to wait on him, go away again. Besides that—and Jimmy glanced at his watch—Rus Emerson had promised to run over at ten to see how he was getting on, and it certainly wouldn't do to be missing when Rus arrived! Tiring of watching the street, Jimmy went back behind the counter. There was no chair there, which he thought showed a sad want of interest, on the part of his employers, in his comfort, but he found that it was possible to squeeze a scant portion of his anatomy against the boxes on the lowest shelf and maintain his position there by bracing his feet against the edge of the counter. He had just got himself satisfactorily settled when the doorway was darkened and an anxious voice hailed him above the tramp of hurrying footsteps.

"Where's the tennis racket?" called Russell anxiously.

Jimmy dropped his feet and came upright very promptly. "Tennis racket?" he repeated. "*The* tennis racket? If you mean—"

"I mean the one in the window," interrupted Russell excitedly. "It's gone!"

"Oh, that!" replied Jimmy casually. He brushed an invisible speck from a sleeve and smiled boredly. "We sold that."

## CHAPTER XIV

### JIMMY'S DAY

True to his word, Steve Gaston used Russell more gingerly on Tuesday, and Russell, who was still aching in many places, was grateful. Just the same, he was not entirely satisfied when, after a twenty-minute practice line-up between the two scrub squads, the second crossed the field to the first team gridiron and he made the discovery that it was Tierney who was to play right end. It takes more than a few pains to reconcile your enthusiastic football player to the bench—or, in this case, the sod. And yesterday's short taste of the game had reawakened all of Russell's old ardor. But he wasn't to be quite neglected, for in the middle of the second twelve-minute period of battle Tierney was laid low, with every bit of breath eliminated from his body, and Gaston sent a quick call across the field for Russell. Back in the game, facing the redoubtable Captain Proctor or warily watching Crocker, at left end on the enemy team, Russell forgot his aches and entere lustily into the fray. Crocker proved a troublesome opponent that afternoon, for the first was trying out a "bunch forward" in which, when the play was made to the left, Crocker and Har-

mon and Browne participated, or sought to. Russell, aided by Reilly, had an anxious and breathless time of it. It is to their credit, though, that the "bunch" succeeded but twice and then on the other side of the field. First scored but once today, and only after a blocked kick on the scrub's thirty-six yards, when Putney, the first team right tackle, grabbed up the bouncing pigskin and marvelously dashed through half the enemy forces and planted it behind the line. The second had two tries at goal from the field, and Kendall missed both. On the whole, however, the second was fairly well satisfied with the afternoon, and even Gaston looked as though he spied a glint of hope in the clouds of adversity.

That evening Russell's thoughts turned wistfully toward a nice clean cot in the school infirmary, and every time he moved he groaned either in spirit or very audibly, depending on whether or not he was alone. Yet life held its cheering aspects, for Stick had jubilantly reported three sales during the afternoon, which, combined with Jimmy's sale of the tennis racket, brought the day's business up to the colossal sum of thirteen dollars and eighty-three cents, a sum hitherto never even approached. Jimmy came in after supper and the three talked the matter over in detail and with much enthusiasm. Stick forgot to be pessimistic and swung to the other extreme. His sales had been to high school fellows, and he

had discovered that there were two hundred and twenty-two of them in this year's enrollment and proceeded to prove, to his own satisfaction at least, that the high school students were due to enrich the firm of Emerson and Patterson to the tune of one dollar and eighty-seven cents, net, every day until the middle of next June.

"I guess," said Russell when that fact had been thoroughly demonstrated by the very earnest Stick, "that that advertisement we put in the high school paper fetched those fellows. It might be a good plan to keep it running."

But Stick didn't see that. Advertising cost a heap of money, and now that the ball had been started rolling there wasn't any sense in going on with it. "Those fellows will tell other fellows," he asserted, "and that's the best sort of advertising there is."

"We are advertised by our loving friends," quoted Jimmy.

Russell agreed to discontinue the high school advertisement, but he was firm for going on with the one in *The Doubleay,* and Stick dubiously agreed to that wasteful course. Jimmy described once more with great gusto the details concerning the sale of the tennis racket—they laughingly referred to it as "the" racket, since it had been the only one in stock—and predicted that much trade would accrue from Mount Millard School as a result of his brilliant acumen.

"We might," began Russell, "put an ad. in their paper—" But Stick's unhappy frown cut him short, and he dropped the subject and turned back to Jimmy. "You keep talking about six and a quarter," he said perplexedly. "You mean six and a half, don't you?"

"Eh? Oh, the price of it! Yes, yes, six and a half. I was thinking about the discount, I guess."

"But the discount brought it to five-eighty-five."

"Yes, well—you see, I'm an awful ass at figures," answered Jimmy desperately. Not for worlds would he have had Russell know that he had mulcted himself of that twenty-three cents!

"Well, I don't know what you think about it, Stick," said Russell, "but I believe Jimmy has brought us luck!"

And Stick, rather unwillingly, agreed.

And as time went on that conviction strengthened with Russell. By the end of that week business had picked up enormously at the Sign of the Football. There had come a letter from Mount Millard ordering "one of those rakets like George Titus bought from you resently," and as the money was enclosed Russell didn't find it incumbent on him to criticize the spelling. High school boys were frequent visitors in the afternoons. They didn't always buy, but those who didn't spread the news and others came in their places. Another football had found its way to

the Academy, and more and more Altonians were learning to enter under the alluring sign rather than to proceed a few doors further to the more pretentious House of Crocker. All this was vastly cheering to Russell and to Stick, and hardly less so to Jimmy, who, if not one of the firm, was nevertheless fully as interested in the success of the business as either of the others. Sid Greenwood had dropped in one morning when Russell was there and had looked and talked and pored over catalogues, and it was already an assured fact that the Sign of the Football was to have the patronage of the Basket Ball Team. And Bob Coolidge had broadly hinted but a few days later that it would be a good plan for Russell to put in a few sample hockey sticks and skates and so on; and Russell had duly ordered. Ordering was a regular daily performance now. Fellows were very good-natured about waiting a day or so, which was certainly fortunate, for only occasionally as yet did the store have just what was wanted! Russell or Stick or Jimmy would open an empty box, out of sight of the customer, frown, put it back, open a second and then shake his head. "Sorry, but we haven't your size," he would announce apologetically, or, "We've sold the last one." Always, though, such a remark was invariably followed promptly by a reassuring: "They're on order and will be along to-morrow. If you don't mind dropping in about half-past four

it'll be here." The New York train that carried the noon mail and express reached Alton at four. It took only fifteen or twenty minutes to get the goods from the post office or express company, and at four-thirty the customer went away contentedly. There was a slim black-covered book behind the counter and into this the orders went, and some time before six o'clock Russell would take himself to the telephone office and call up the New York dealer. Seldom did the dealer disappoint him.

Money was coming in now, but money was also going out, and the balance in the firm's name at the bank was growing very slowly. Stick frowned often and darkly at the size of the orders that were despatched to the city and still more darkly at the checks drawn in settlement for them. But even Stick's economical brain couldn't find any way of selling goods without ordering them or of ordering them without ultimately paying for them. Meanwhile Jimmy was becoming a salesman of ability, to say nothing of poise. Jimmy had a way of selling a nose-guard as though it were a diamond set in platinum, and no purchaser of so small an item as a tennis ball went away without feeling that he had been treated like a person of importance and had somehow unintentionally managed to get the best of the transaction.

Russell's aches left him gradually and by the end of that week he had fairly beaten out Tierney

for the position at the right end of the second team line. The first team found their daily opponent a harder and harder proposition, and on Friday, for the first time, the scrimmage ended without a score for either side. To be sure, only one twelve-minute period was played, but even so—

The big team made its first trip away from home the next day and played Lorimer Academy. Lorimer had last year held Alton to a 3 to 3 tie, and an easy contest was neither expected nor found. At the end of the first half the opponents were even, with a touchdown and goal each. In spite of the story told by the score, Alton had showed rather better work, and the ball had, save for one brief and regrettable period, remained in Lorimer territory. The regrettable period had occurred at the beginning of the game, when, receiving the ball on the kick-off, Lorimer had brought it back to Alton's forty-one yards. That unexpected feat had quite nonplused the visitors and during the next series of plays they showed that it had, for two gains had been made through the left of their line for a first down on the thirty-yard line. From there, following an attempt at Putney that yielded a scant stride, Lorimer threw forward to the fifteen-yard line where an unwatched halfback caught and, although chased down by Harley McLeod, managed to fall across the last line mark just inside the boundary. There was some dis-

cussion as to whether the runner had not gone out before he got the ball over, but the officials gave him the benefit of the doubt. Lorimer kicked the goal easily.

After that Alton had pulled herself together, quickly wrested the pigskin from the enemy and taken the offensive. There was, though, no score for her until the second period was well along. Then a long, hard march from the center of the field to Lorimer's eighteen yards culminated in a series of smashing attacks on the enemy's left by Harmon and Moncks, and on the seventh play the ball went over. Captain Proctor kicked the goal.

When the third quarter started Lorimer showed the benefit of the rest and, possibly, of the coach's tuition. She kicked off to the Gray-and-Gold and her ends spilled Ned Richards on his ten-yard line. After two running plays that failed to advance, Alton punted to Lorimer's forty. Lorimer pulled a trick play that went for twelve yards around the opponent's left end. A jab at the center was wasted and her quarter punted diagonally to Alton's eight yards where Harmon gathered in the ball but was forced outside after a few strides. The pigskin was too near home for comfort, and Ned Richards stepped aside in favor of Browne on second down and Browne punted to midfield. Again Lorimer tried a quarter-back kick and again gained. Ned Richards, waiting for the ball to bound over the goal line for a touchback, saw

it change its mind erratically and start back up the field. He fell on it finally near the five-yard line, with, by that time, most of the Lorimer forwards hovering about him.

Alton decided to kick on first down, and Browne stepped back behind the goal posts. Nichols passed low and the full-back punt was necessarily hurried. The ball sailed high in the air and descended near the twenty-yard line, and the Lorimer back who caught it very carefully stepped outside, since there was no chance for an advance. The pigskin was stepped in and Lorimer found herself in the fortunate position of being in possession of the ball on first down on the enemy's nineteen yards. A fake attack to the left, with left half running to the right took the ball to the center of the field, although for no gain. Lorimer prepared for a placement kick from close to the thirty yards, but the pigskin was taken by quarter through Stimson for two. Again, on third down, the same preparations were carefully gone through with, and this time the ball went back to the kicker, instead of the holder, and then was hurled through the air to where, one foot over the goal line, an end had stationed himself. It was a pretty pass, well concealed, well thrown and well caught, and although Harmon brought down the catcher promptly the touchdown was accomplished. Again Lorimer kicked the goal.

Alton was chagrined and rather angry. It was

very evident that, since her defense against the opponent's forward passing game was not good enough, the opponent must not be allowed again within scoring distance of the goal. It was extremely trying, extremely exasperating to be twice scored on by a team who was plainly unable to gain consistently by rushing! Coach Cade seized the interim following the goal to remove Crocker from left end and to substitute Rhame and to put Johnson at right tackle in place of Putney who was showing the battle. The third period ended in a punting duel between Browne, for Alton, and Snow, for Lorimer, and when the teams changed sides it was Alton's ball on her thirty-four yards.

There was then a slight advantage in the possession of the south goal, for a breeze had arisen since the beginning of the half and was blowing, at moments quite strongly, toward the other end of the field. Austen had replaced Harmon, and to Jimmy was handed the task of using that breeze to work the team's way inside the enemy's first defenses. As a prelude, Moncks took the ball and managed to batter through left guard for four yards. Then Jimmy punted and, getting height, saw the breeze take a hand in his effort and add a good ten yards to the kick. Rhame was on the catcher almost before the ball had landed in his arms. Lorimer tried two attempts outside tackle and then punted in turn. But Alton had gained nearly ten yards on the exchange, and, after a first

down that netted barely a yard gain, Jimmy again stepped back and, the Gray-and-Gold line holding well, punted with his customary deliberateness and again got more than fifty yards. This time Lorimer ran the pigskin back across one white line before she was stopped. Lorimer recognized the futility of pitting her punter against Alton's in the circumstances, but, with her back to her goal, there was no help for it after two desperate rushes had been stopped for five yards, and again the ball sailed off. This time the kick was weak and Appel, who had just relieved Richards, caught it on Lorimer's forty-seven yards and, feinting and twirling, cut across the field with it, found open territory for a moment and sped along to the thirty-five before his meteoric career was stopped.

That proved the result that Alton had sought. From the thirty-five yards to the twenty she went in four rushes. There she was slowed up and a short forward pass, Browne to McLeod, was used as a last resort and did the business. After that, with a small coterie of devoted Altonians begging for a touchdown, the result was not long in doubt. Still smarting over her indignities, Alton hammered and thrust, and, reaching the six yards in two downs, hurled Moncks past left tackle for half the remaining distance and then literally piled through the center of the Lorimer line and deposited Appel and the ball well over the last mark.

Unfortunately, Mart Proctor missed the goal

miserably, and the handful of Alton supporters groaned. Lorimer was still one point ahead and the time was getting short. Captain Proctor gave way to Butler and Linthicum went in for Browne. During the remaining minutes several more changes were made in the Alton line-up, so that when the last whistle blew the Gray-and-Gold presented a thoroughly second-string appearance.

Lorimer fought for time now, fought to keep the opponent away from scoring territory, punting even on first down and against that breeze. But she didn't have many chances to put boot leather to pigskin, for Alton was through with the kicking game. Lorimer was beatable by surer methods, and Alton returned to rushing. Twice her backs got almost free around the Lorimer ends and once Linthicum found a barn-door opening in the center and staggered through for twelve yards. With the time-keeper's watch showing something less than two minutes left, the ball was Alton's on the home team's thirty-six. Appel held a whispered conference with Rowlandson, who had succeeded to the captaincy, and then sprung a surprise. Linthicum was sent back to kicking position and, since a field-goal would win the game for Alton, Lorimer never doubted that, with the time nearly up, a drop-kick would follow. But Jimmy Austen got the ball when it left center and Jimmy found as many holes in front of him as there are in a sieve and proceeded to ooze through

one of them. And, being through, he kept right on oozing, just how no one, least of all Jimmy, could have afterwards told. But he oozed faster and faster. In fact, the ooze became a trickle and then a spurt, and, escaping a tackle here and dodging an enemy there, turning, twisting, as elusive as a drop of quicksilver, Jimmy somehow kept going straight for the goal and somehow got there, got there without having been once tackled, got there through the whole enemy team and with never a bit of aid from his own side! And, having got there, Jimmy put the ball down, hunched his shoulders and philosophically and even smilingly bore the useless onslaught of the infuriated enemy.

It didn't matter that Rowlandson missed the goal. No one expected him to make it, certainly not Rowlandson, for he was no goal expert and, as he put it, became the goat only for lack of some one better qualified. He managed to send the ball between the posts, but only because the line of discouraged opponents hadn't enough interest left to put up a hand and stop it!

There was one more kick-off and four more plays, and then the game was over. Every fellow loves a hero, and so, for quite a week, Jimmy Austen wore the laurels. And doubtless he deserved them, although, as Jimmy explained often enough during the next forty-eight hours, no one but a cripple could have failed to make that touchdown! "Their old line was full of holes," said

Jimmy. "They were all set for a try-at-goal and came pouring through as soon as the ball was off. All I had to do was hug the old turnip and let 'em by. Then I side-stepped a couple and took it across. There's no sense in making a fuss about it!"

But they did—for a while. In football there's a new hero, of larger or smaller caliber, every week or so, and Jimmy's fame only lived until the Hillsport game the following Saturday, when Ned Richards sprinted sixty-odd yards for the score that evened up matters in the third period and turned what looked horribly like defeat into a 6 to 6 tie.

## CHAPTER XV

### MR. CROCKER CALLS

Russell didn't see the Loring game, although there was no second team practice that afternoon to prevent. Instead he took Stick's place in the store, allowing that youth to put in an afternoon at tennis, the only kind of physical exertion he approved of. Russell was glad that he had done this long before closing time arrived, for he spent a very busy time at the Sign of the Football. There was one heart-stirring quarter of an hour when, by actual count, seven customers lined the counter! Russell surreptitiously counted the throng a second time, incredulously certain that he had overestimated. Even femininity invaded the store when two high school girls came in search of sweaters. Russell, always shy in the presence of the opposite sex, was all thumbs when it came to displaying his wares and, for the first time, wished that he had not relieved Stick. Stick wouldn't be disturbed in the least by the whole female population of Alton! Nothing, pursued Russell in his thoughts, as he clumsily brought a pile of boxes crashing down on his head, ever did disturb Stick much except an attack on his pocketbook.

The two young ladies were extremely self-possessed and viewed Russell's embarrassment with a sort of kindly contempt. The boy's first hopeful announcement that they carried no girls' sweaters failed of the effect he desired. They did not, they explained calmly, want girls' sweaters, but boys' sweaters. After that there was nothing for it but to display wares, falteringly explain why the garments were priced half a dollar higher than similar garments purchased by the fair customers in New Haven two years before and resist a horrible temptation to wipe the perspiration from his brow. Russell heaped the counter high with boxes —some of them, of course, empty—and got very much mixed in the matter of sizes and prices. In the end, when the shoppers severely declared that they would take two of the sweaters but couldn't think of paying the price set for them, Russell weakly but, oh, so gladly knocked off a quarter of a dollar, almost frantically wrapped the parcels up, overlooked a discrepancy of a nickel in one payment, and, had not courtesy forbade, would have joyously pushed them out the door.

When they were at last gone, he wiped his forehead, sighed deeply with heartfelt relief and wondered if it would not be a good idea to hang a card in the window with some such inscription on it as "Gentlemen Only" or "No Females Need Apply"! After that he sold a pair of woolen hose to an Alton chap and two tennis balls to a tall

bespectacled gentleman who, Russell suspected, was the "Painless Dentist" further down the street. The hour for closing was nearing and Mr. J. Warren Pulsifer, who had been leaning in a sort of trance over his books in the wire cage since four o'clock, moved and sighed loudly. Then followed business of locking a drawer with much jangling of keys, the clanging of the cage door and the florist set his hat on his head, looked dubiously at the single light in the further window—Mr. Pulsifer never lighted his window—took three boxes from the glass-fronted case at the back of the store and passed out with a dismal "good night." Those three boxes, which, Russell concluded, Mr. J. Warren Pulsifer was going to deliver in person, appeared to constitute the day's business of the florist's establishment. Russell wondered whether it was possible that the dejected gentleman made money over his expenses. It didn't seem that he could, for the few orders that came to him surely did amount to more than thirty dollars a week. Russell's thoughts were still on Mr. Pulsifer when the doorway was darkened by a large, thickset man in a suit of black and a wide-brimmed felt hat of the same color. When he came into the light from the window Russell recognized him.

"Good evening, Mr. Crocker," he said politely.

Mr. Crocker replied affably and then looked curiously about him. "Your name's Emerson, I

take it," he said finally. "Nice little establishment you've got here."

Russell agreed, although he saw quite plainly that the visitor didn't think it a nice little establishment at all, that, on the contrary, he had viewed it rather contemptuously.

"Thought," continued the hardware merchant, "I'd stop in and have a word or two with you."

"Very kind, I'm sure," murmured Russell.

"Well, I'm an old hand at the selling game, Mr. Emerson, and I've learned one or two things you haven't—yet. You're young and, I guess you won't mind my saying so, inexperienced."

"Not in the least, sir."

"Exactly," pursued the other, interpreting the boy's reply to suit himself. "Now I'm always glad to help young fellows like you who are just starting out for themselves. I've done it many times. Us older men mustn't forget that we owe a duty to youth and inexperience. That's why I dropped in, Mr. Emerson." Mr. Crocker had thrust his hands into the pockets of a pair of capacious trousers and was observing Russell smilingly across the counter. "Now you and I are in the same line of business, partly. That is, you sell athletic supplies and so do I. Of course, it's a small part of my business, but I'm not hankering to lose it. Not," added Mr. Crocker, quickly, "that there's any danger of that. I've always welcomed competition, Mr. Emerson. There's

plenty of trade here for you and me both if we handle it right."

"I hope so," affirmed Russell.

"Yes, but cutting prices isn't going to get us anywhere." Mr. Crocker smiled almost playfully. His was a leather-grained, deeply-furrowed countenance, and that arch smile looked extremely out of place. "No, sir." He shook his head gently but emphatically. "No, sir, my young friend, cutting prices is bad for us. You cut and I cut and what's left? Neither of us is making a profit. I'm not in business for pleasure, and neither are you, I take it. Now, the best thing for both of us is to come to a sort of friendly agreement. As I said before, there's trade enough for us both, and there's no sense in throwing away our profits. That's sense, isn't it?"

"Perfect sense, Mr. Crocker. But I haven't been throwing away my profits, so far as I know, sir."

"You've been selling goods ten, fifteen, twenty per cent under the usual local prices," replied Mr. Crocker firmly. "I manage to keep tabs on what's going on around me, my friend."

"I've been selling goods at prices that bring me a fair profit, Mr. Crocker, a profit that I'm satisfied with. Of course, it costs me less to do business than it costs you, sir, but that's nothing for me to worry about."

The hardware man looked searchingly at Rus-

sell and stiffened. "You've been cutting prices to get my trade, young man," he announced severely. "I'm here to tell you it's got to stop. I came in here like a friend, but I'm going out an enemy if you persist in taking that tone with me. Don't think I'll let you get my business away from me, sir, because I won't. It's been tried before." Mr. Crocker's face hardened and his voice was grim. "Four years ago a fellow opened up right over there, where Whitson is now. He lasted eight months. Then the sheriff sold him out. There's been others, too. You take my advice and think it over. Why"—Mr. Crocker's gaze traveled disparagingly over the shelves and the little show-case—"why, you haven't enough stock here to run three weeks if you were getting any business."

"In that case, why worry, sir?" asked Russell.

"Oh, I'm not worrying! That's up to you." Mr. Crocker smiled again, but the smile was more like a snarl. "You think it over. That's my advice to you. You think it over and then drop around to see me about Monday. There's no reason why you and I shouldn't come to an agreement on prices, Mr. Emerson. I'm willing to come down a little here and there. I'll be fair. We can fix it so's you'll make a bigger profit than you're making now—if you're making any; which I doubt—and won't lose any of your trade. If

you don't decide to be reasonable, why, you'd better look for another line of business!"

Mr. Crocker settled his hat more squarely on his head, nodded curtly and went out. When he had gone Russell put out the lights and locked the door, all very thoughtfully. The thoughtfulness continued while he strode quickly to State street and thence made his way to the Green and to Upton Hall. In Number 27 he recounted briefly to Stick the conversation with Mr. Crocker. Stick was fairly aghast.

"I knew something rotten would happen," he groaned. "I knew the luck was too good to hold. Well, I guess there's only one thing to do."

"That's all I see," agreed Russell as he hurriedly prepared for supper.

"And maybe," went on Stick, a wee bit more hopefully, "he's right, Rus. Maybe we'll do just as well if we charge a little more for things. I suppose it is rather cheeky for us to open up almost next door to the old codger and try to undersell him. In a way, it was fairly decent of him to give us a warning, wasn't it?"

"Well, perhaps. But wasn't it sort of a confession of weakness, Stick?"

"I don't get you."

"Why, if he really thinks he can put us out of business, why should he come and offer us a part of the trade? Why not take it all?"

"I suppose he wanted to be fair," answered

Stick, doubtfully. Then he started and shot an anxious look at his companion. "Look here, Rus," he exclaimed, "you're—you're not thinking of acting the fool!"

"Hope not. Depends on what you mean by acting the fool."

"I mean you're not going to try to buck him, are you?"

"I guess you could call it that," answered Russell easily. "At least, I don't propose to let Crocker or any one else come and tell me—"

"But you can't do that!" wailed Stick. "I'm as much interested in that store as you are—almost, and—and I won't have it! We can't afford to make an enemy of that fellow, Rus. He'll do just as he told you and we'll be broke in a month. There's no use in being stubborn. Of course, it isn't pleasant to have him dictating to us, but he's got the whip-hand, now hasn't he?"

"He may have, but I doubt it." Russell gave a final pat to his tie and glanced at the little clock on his chiffonier. "Come on and let's eat, Stick. We can talk about this later."

Stick, however, chose to talk about it all the way to Lawrence and would have talked about it during supper had Russell given him an opportunity. But Russell dived into general conversation and left his partner to silent and moody meditation. Stick was so thoroughly alarmed that he ate almost nothing; and Stick's appetite was nor-

mally something to be proud of. Afterwards the subject was returned to and the two came nearer to a quarrel than they ever had before. Only the fact that Russell refused to get angry prevented it. Stick pleaded and begged, argued and, at length, commanded, but Russell was not to be moved.

"We agreed," he said firmly, "that, as I had put more money into this than you had, I was to have the say in such matters as this. And I've thought it over carefully, Stick, and I mean to go right on as we've been going. Look here, now. Suppose we agreed to Crocker's plan. We make an agreement with him not to sell goods below a certain price. He had all the trade before and he will have it all again. He says there is business enough for both of us. That listens well, but it isn't true. Our only chance of making good lies in getting a whole lot of trade away from him if we can do it. And we're doing it. And that's what's worrying him. He's been selling things at a big profit, just as though the War hadn't ever stopped, and there's been no one to interfere with it. Now we come along and put a fair price on our goods and, of course, we're getting customers away from him. Every day some one comes in and says, 'Why, Crocker asks fifty cents more than that,' or sixty cents, or whatever it may be. He realizes that he's either got to scare us into an agreement on prices or lower his own prices; yes,

and put better goods in stock, too! He hates to get less than he's been getting, and so he tries to frighten us. Well, he can't do it. We don't frighten. As for driving us away, why, he will find that we're hard to drive, Stick. He simply can't do it."

"That's all well enough to say," replied Stick desperately, "but how do you know he can't? Suppose he lowers his prices below ours? Then what happens? Why, folks go to him, of course, and we sit and whistle. And then the rent comes due and a lot of bills come piling in and—bingo! good-by, Football!"

"Crocker will have to cut a lot below our prices, Stick, to get any trade away from us. In the first place, we sell better stuff. You know that yourself. Then we treat customers a heap better, and we know our stock. But, if we do begin to slip, we'll cut prices, too. We can play that game just as well as he can."

"No, we can't! He's got all sorts of other goods to sell, and we haven't. He could run his sporting goods department at a loss for months and not have to worry!"

"He would worry, just the same," said Russell, smiling. "I know Crocker's sort. He'd worry if a clerk sold a five cent screwdriver at less than ten! But never mind that. Those P. and F. folks are after business, Stick. They're making a hard drive to introduce their goods here in the east,

and, I think, they're having difficulty. The other folks are fighting them for every inch. Now if I run over to New York and tell them that Crocker is cutting prices on rival goods they'll stand back of us, I'll bet. They'll sell to us at prices that'll let us meet Crocker and go him one better."

"That's what you think," sneered Stick. "You always think what you want to think, Rus. That's your trouble. You're too blamed optimistic. I'd rather hear the P. and F. folks say so before I banked on it!"

"They'll say so when the time comes," replied Russell cheerfully. "But I don't believe it will come."

"I know you don't," said Stick disgustedly. "But I do! All right, go ahead in your own stubborn, silly-ass way and ruin us! I've said all I have to say. Except this. I wish to goodness I'd never gone into this fool thing, and if I could get out of it—"

"We're making pretty fair profits now, Stick," returned Russell quietly, "and maybe, later, we can arrange it."

"Huh!" snorted Stick. "Later! By that time there won't be anything left to arrange!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### ALTON SQUEEZES THROUGH

It was after the Hillsport game that the slump began. The first team seemed to fairly droop under the shock of that unexpected reverse; for to be played to a tie by that opponent was virtually no less than a defeat. Last year, even on Hillsport's own field, Alton had easily beaten the other by 14 to 0, and for years past Hillsport had gone down in defeat, often ingloriously. On this regrettable occasion, however, the enemy had honestly earned her touchdown by outrushing Alton all through the first two periods and, finally, by old-fashioned smashing tactics, pushing across for a score. Had Hillsport possessed a more adept goal-kicker she might have departed with a victory. Ned Richards' scurry down the field for Alton's touchdown in the last moments of the third period had been a splendid piece of individual brilliancy, and it had, in a measure, saved the day for the Gray-and-Gold, but there was no blinking the fact that all of Alton's efforts to gain through the Hillsport line had failed and that against a heavy, fast-working, clever team the Gray-and-Gold had showed up rather miserably. All this, realized by the onlookers, had not been lost on the players

themselves, and the effect of the knowledge seemed to be paralyzing. The team promptly passed into what Captain Mart feelingly termed a "forty below" slump. Coach Cade sweated and scolded and planned and pleaded, and all through the following week the second pushed and tossed the big team about the gridiron with an amazing lack of respect. The second, awaking to the evident fact that the opponent was not, after all, invulnerable, took revenge for past abuse and aspersion and bullied and maltreated the first eleven brutally. In this reprehensible course they were aided and abetted, nay, even encouraged, by one Steve Gaston. Steve had no mercy, or, at least, showed none. The second jestingly referred to the daily scrimmage as the "massacre." "Come on," Captain Falls would blithely call. "Let's go over and finish 'em up, second!" Now all this was fine for the morale of the second, as was speedily proved. Success, instead of spoiling them, improved them. It welded them more firmly together just as, doubtless, a successful sortie by the Robber Barons of the Rhine in the old days produced an increased *esprit de corps*. Probably a career of crime, such as the second was now following, is like that. Anyhow, Steve Gaston secretly rejoiced as he incited his desperadoes to greater atrocities.

The first didn't take their drubbings meekly, you may be sure, but they took them. They took them

"I wish to goodness I'd never gone into this fool thing"

three times that week. They almost cried at some of the indignities put upon them by an awakened and merciless scrub, and they fought back desperately and staged many "come backs" that never developed, and the School, attracted by the novel, well-nigh incredible spectacle of a first team being baited and beaten by a second, flocked to the field of an afternoon as for a Roman holiday. They didn't always see the helpless victim devoured by the ravening lion, for twice the victim forgot his rôle and held the lion at bay, and once —that was Friday—even sent him cringing back to his lair, defeated! But in any case the spectators got their money's worth in thrills.

It would be nice to be able to say that Russell was the bright particular star of the second, but he wasn't anything of the sort. Russell didn't aspire to be a star, and maybe he couldn't have been, anyway. Besides, Steve Gaston didn't hold with stars. He discouraged them as soon as they lifted their heads into sight. His idea of a good football team was one in which eleven men acted as one man and in which none stood out above his fellows. Steve's slogan was "Fight!"

"I don't care," he would say, "how much football a fellow knows if he won't fight. He's no use on this team. Football's fighting, from first to last. Keep that in mind. The fellow who fights hardest wins. Fight fair, but *fight*. Some of you chaps act as if you thought you were in this

to let the first slap your face and get away with it. You're not, by gumbo! You want to forget that the first team fellows are members of the same frat! They're your enemies from the moment the whistle blows, and your business is to everlastingly whale 'em. Beat the tar out of 'em! Knock the spots off 'em! That's football. That's the game. The harder you use those fellows, the harder they'll use Kenly. Paste that in your helmet!"

Russell took Steve's earnest commands with a grain of salt; wherein he was wrong, for Steve meant all he said. Russell liked football and liked to play it hard, just as he liked to do anything else he attempted, but he retained all through that unprecedented week a sneaking sympathy for the first. Probably others of his mates did also, even if they dissembled the fact most successfully. Russell made his mistake in not thoroughly dissembling, which is why there was a knock on his door that Friday evening and Coach Gaston entered.

As was his way, Steve got to business at once. "I've been watching you playing pretty closely this last week, Emerson," he began, settling into a chair, "and I'm curious. Thought I'd come around and have a little talk with you. Now, suppose you tell me, first off, just what you think the matter is."

"Matter?" echoed Russell. "What is the matter?"

"You tell me," answered the coach. "I've seen fellows who could play and fellows who couldn't play—a lot more of the last kind than the first, you bet!—but it's sort of out of the ordinary to find a fellow who can play and doesn't. Must be a reason, of course, so I thought I'd ask you."

Russell looked every bit as puzzled as he felt. "But I don't get you, Gaston. Are you—do you mean *me?*"

Gaston nodded. "Of course. You're the man. If it's a private matter, Emerson, and you'd rather not let me in on it—"

"But I *am* playing, Gaston! I don't understand what you mean!"

"Yes, you're *playing,* and I guess that's the trouble. Maybe some one's clipped your claws, eh?"

Russell couldn't have said whether Gaston's tone had been sneering or not, but he flushed as he answered warmly: "If you mean that I'm not trying my hardest and doing my best—"

"Uh-huh, that's it," replied the coach easily. "Why don't you?"

"But I tell you I am!"

Gaston smiled gently and shook his head. "No, you're not, Emerson. Maybe you think you are, but you're not. You go through the motions very

nicely. You follow the ball as closely as any of the fellows, you sense plays well and you handle yourself finely. But you always hold something back, son. I've seen it time and again. To-day, for instance, you let Crocker get around you twice, and you tackled Austen on one play there as though you thought he was made of glass and might break in the middle."

"I stopped him," protested Russell.

"Sure, you stopped him! But, man alive, don't you know that he was carrying the ball? Don't you know that a smashing hard tackle will sometimes make the runner drop the ball? I've seen a college game won by the team that tackled the hardest. Sooner or later a runner will get a jar that'll send the ball out of his arms. It doesn't happen often, but it does happen, and it's worth counting on, Emerson, for games have been won before now because of a fumbled ball."

"But I don't want to kill any one!"

"Don't worry about that. Players don't get hurt by hard tackling, beyond a bruise or two. It's because we count on hard tackles and stiff blows that we train for the game as we do. No fellow who learns to take a fall the right way gets anything broken. Emerson, you can't play football and consider the other fellow's feelings. Now, as I've said, I've watched you, and I like your style, but, by gumbo, son, you're not doing your-

self justice! And you're not playing fair by me! You've heard me tell the team over and over that when the game starts those other chaps aren't friends of ours, they're the enemy. And the enemy is something to lick! I don't care if the man playing opposite you shares your room here, Emerson. When you're playing against him he's just as much your foe as if he wore the red K on his sweater! Funny I can't drill that into you chaps. I've tried hard enough!"

"Seems to me," said Russell, "that's carrying it pretty far."

"No, it isn't. You think a minute. What are we in business for? To give practice to the first team, eh? Sure! All right. Now suppose we're a poor lot. What's the result? First gets feeble opposition. She walks through us, holds us for downs, fools us on plays, out-punts us. She gets the notion that she's pretty good and is right pleased and cocky. Then she runs up against a real team and gets knocked into a cocked hat. What good's that?"

"I know all that," acknowledged Russell, "but we aren't that bad, Gaston."

"Of course not, but don't you see the point? We're here to do our honest, level best, Emerson, to fight hard every minute, to show the first that she's just a bunch of mutts, to knock her down and rub her face in the mud and teach her to fight,

*fight!* That's our part in licking Kenly next month. That's our share of the big moment. The better we are, the better the first will be."

Russell sighed. "Maybe that's all true, Gaston, but it doesn't seem to me that we have to play like muckers to do our share."

"Muckers! Gosh, no! But there's nothing muckerish in playing hard. Hard playing isn't dirty playing, Emerson. I'll chuck any fellow on the second who plays dirty, and do it before the umpire can open his mouth. But I want my men to give me everything they've got, Emerson. When they give it to me they're giving it to the School. Next month you'll sit and watch the big team wallop Kenly, and you'll say to yourself: 'Some team that, some team! And I helped build it! I blamed near wore myself out, and maybe I won't get the last bandage off before Christmas, but it was worth it! That's my team that's winning, and I taught it how!' Well, I must be going. There's a conference at Johnny's in ten minutes. Think over what I've said, Emerson. Good night."

And Steve was gone, having wasted no time on ceremony.

Russell did think it over, during the ensuing few minutes before Stick came in and, later, when the light was out and he was curled up in bed. He knew that Gaston was right, and before he went to sleep he had determined that the second

team coach should never again have cause to reproach him for holding back. Maybe Gaston took the whole thing too seriously, but that was up to Gaston. Russell's duty was to obey orders.

The first journeyed to New Falmouth the next day and played High School. New Falmouth was a manufacturing town and the High School bunch was a very husky aggregation of youths who played the game of football earnestly and in a manner that doubtless won the warm commendation of Steve Gaston. It is possible, though, that they sometimes allowed their enthusiasm to lead them into devious ways, for there was much penalizing that afternoon and some cautioning, and if further proof was needed there was Nichols' ensanguined nose and Mart Proctor's extremely discolored eye! The game was lacking in science but not in interest, for it see-sawed back and forth as the twelve-minute periods passed and neither the goodly army of Alton supporters or the much larger assemblage of enthusiastic and strongly prejudiced New Falmouth cohorts dared predict a victory for its team. At the end of the first quarter Alton was in the lead, 6 to 0. When the half was done the teams were tied at 6 to 6. When the third period had passed into history, the Gray-and-Gold was once more trailing, for again New Falmouth had scored a touchdown, without, however, adding a goal to it. At the final tooting of the horn Alton was victorious by the narrow mar-

gin of one point, the complete score being 13 to 12. Mawson, succeeding where Mart Proctor had previously failed, had added the deciding point amidst the hostile howls and shrieks of the enemy. After that five minutes more of play had failed to alter the figures.

Alton had certainly not done herself proud, but she derived some joy from the victory and returned home with the notion that she had got her feet back on terra firma once more and that, come Monday, she would show that second team that it couldn't bite her and get away with it! That was the team's notion. The School wasn't nearly so set-up, while Coach Cade, although he kept his own counsel, was not unduly optimistic. That slump was still hanging around, as the day's game had shown, and he didn't look for an immediate departure. Such maladies as that which held the Alton football eleven in its grip are mysterious and difficult to conquer. They must run their course, although that course may be shortened by skillful handling of the case. Having tried heroic measures for a week, Coach Cade now decided to try opposite methods. On Monday there was no work for any of those who had taken part in the New Falmouth game, and, consequently, no scrimmage with the second. On Tuesday the work was light, and again there was no meeting with the scrubs. The latter were chagrined and insulting. The first didn't dare face them, they declared.

Johnny was afraid to have them hurt. As a result of such charges there were two mix-ups between first and second team players, one in the locker-room that was halted this side of bloodshed, and one which was said to have gone four full rounds to no decision. The latter was held back of Haylow and witnessed by an appreciative audience in nearby windows. Neither affair did anything towards fostering that spirit of forbearance so deplored by Steve Gaston!

Meanwhile, from Kenly came bright reports of the Cherry-and-Black team, and Alton Academy settled down into deep pessimism on the subject of the big game. This, it was clear, was not to be an Alton year. Youths of literary proclivities wrote indignant letters to the school weekly—a few of which were published—and wherever two or more were gathered together the invariable subject of discourse was What's the Matter with the Team? In such unsatisfactory way the early season passed and the Mount Millard game loomed closely ahead.

## CHAPTER XVII

### STICK CONFIDES HIS TROUBLES

On Wednesday of that week Crocker's Hardware Store had announced in the paper a twenty per cent reduction in the price of athletic goods. Also, as Jimmy had discovered that morning, one window of Crocker's had been devoted to a display of football supplies and a general athletic miscellany. Rather an attractive window it had been, too, although the dresser had evidently experienced some difficulty in finding sufficient articles with which to fill it, since he had eked out with canoe paddles, baseball bats and a lunch hamper. Jimmy had reported the matter with some concern to Russell and that morning and the mornings following had spent a large part of his time at the front door prepared to accost any person looking like a prospective buyer of athletic goods before he could get as far as Crocker's. But Russell had not seemed greatly worried, and events proved that he had had no reason for worry. If there was no great growth in trade at the Sign of the Football, neither was there any perceptible falling off; and Jimmy, who kept a sharp watch on the rival establishment, reported

that so far as he could determine Crocker's was getting no more custom than usual.

Even with that twenty per cent discount it was doubtful if Crocker's prices were yet lower than those of the Sign of the Football, and until they were Russell saw no reason for lowering his own prices. Stick spent a miserable week, fearing financial ruin and doing surreptitious figuring on scraps of paper. Russell was never allowed to see those figures, but he could guess what they meant. Business was really good now, and as the days of that week passed without any lessening of it Stick was almost encouraged to take hope. But it took a great deal to make Stick optimistic and he was still lugubrious when Saturday came. Russell sought to cheer him up by displaying figures that represented the week's sales and the net profits, but Stick only viewed them moodily and sniffed.

"Crocker hasn't started on us yet," he said.

Russell who had toiled hard and whole-heartedly for the last three days at the task of teaching football to the first team wanted very much to see to-day's game. Nevertheless he would not have asked Stick to take his place in the store, since it had become understood that on Saturday afternoons Stick was a gentleman of leisure. But it was Stick who proposed it. He didn't care much about football, anyway, he observed, and if Rus wanted to see the game he, Stick, didn't mind looking after business. So Russell thanked him and

hurried off at three o'clock in an effort to reach the field for the kick-off.

An hour later, the Mountain having failed to come to Mohammed, Mohammed put on his black felt hat, left his store and walked a few doors southward. Secretly he was incensed, outwardly he was unperturbed and even genial. His geniality increased when he found the junior partner instead of the senior presiding behind the counter in the Sign of the Football. He introduced himself to Stick, and Stick replied warily that he was glad to meet him, not being anything of the sort.

Mr. Crocker found the junior partner quite a different proposition from Russell. Stick was uneasy and showed it. There was none of Russell's confident defiance about him. Mr. Crocker leaned against the counter and talked about weather, trade, the Academy and again trade. He impressed Stick vastly, which was just what he intended to do. Stick lost some of his discretion and it wasn't long before the caller was in possession of the knowledge that Stick regretted his financial connection with the Sign of the Football, although Stick didn't say so in so many words. Mr. Crocker gave it as his frank and disinterested opinion that there had been a great mistake made when the Sign of the Football had been opened for business. He quoted figures to Stick, figures showing that it had never paid Mr. Crocker to carry athletic goods and never could pay him.

There was not, he confided, sufficient trade in the town. Only the fact that those who came to purchase athletic goods returned for hardware or related articles sold by Mr. Crocker induced him to continue in the sporting goods business. That sounded reasonable and Stick nodded.

Mr. Crocker suggested that being a junior partner wasn't very satisfactory, anyhow, since you didn't have an equal voice in the conduct of business, and again Stick nodded. Mr. Crocker was fast proving himself a man of discernment and wisdom. It is an odd fact that your extremely suspicious person—and that Stick Patterson surely was—can be readily fooled if the right intelligence undertakes the job. Look around and see if I'm not right. Stick reversed his opinion of Mr. Crocker in something under thirty minutes. He no longer thought him base and designing. On the contrary he saw now that Russell's picture of the hardware merchant had been quite out of drawing and that Mr. Crocker was a kind-meaning, well-intentioned gentleman whose seeming interference in their affairs was actuated by honest and sympathetic motives. In short, Mr. Crocker saw from his long experience the fate awaiting the unfortunate venture of the Sign of the Football and, having the Golden Rule ever in mind, was doing what he could to avert it. Having accepted that estimate of the caller and his errand, Stick became confidential.

Ten minutes later Mr. Crocker, patting his soft hat more firmly on his head, remarked: "Well, if your partner can't be made to see the wise thing there's nothing I can say or do, Mr. Patterson." He smiled kindly and sorrowfully as he moved toward the door.

"I suppose not," assented Stick gloomily. "Gee, if I could get out of it—"

"Yes, you might do that," said Mr. Crocker carelessly.

"Eh?" exclaimed Stick. "How could I?"

Mr. Crocker turned a slightly surprised countenance over his shoulder. "Why, sell out, of course," he said.

"Oh!" replied Stick disappointedly. "I'm willing enough but Russell hasn't got the money. He says he may have it later, but—"

"I don't believe," said Mr. Crocker, pausing and looking thoughtfully through the door, "that your partner would be willing to give you more than you put in for your share of the business."

"I wouldn't expect him to," said Stick. "I'd be glad to get my money back!"

"You ought to do a little better than that," asserted the man. "In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if you could sell at quite a neat little profit, Mr. Patterson."

"I don't believe so, sir. By the time Rus gets ready to buy me out there won't be any business left, I guess."

"I agree with you, but why wait so long? Why not sell now?"

"He won't buy now," answered Stick, a trifle surprised at Mr. Crocker's density.

Mr. Crocker waved a hand carelessly. "Some one else might," he said. Stick stared.

"You mean that—that you—"

"Dear me, no," protested the other. "I wouldn't touch it for half what you put in, Mr. Patterson. You see, I know the business. But there may be others who don't."

"I guess there wouldn't be any one who'd care to buy," said Stick. Mr. Crocker, he thought, was a bit visionary for a man seemingly so hard-headed.

"Possibly not, possibly not," Mr. Crocker returned. "Still, if I should hear of any one looking for a small investment of the sort I'll take the liberty of letting you know. If it isn't too much of a secret, Mr. Patterson, what does your interest here amount to?"

Stick hesitated. The sum was, of course, ridiculously trifling from the point of view of a person of Mr. Crocker's wealth. But Stick finally gave the figures, nevertheless. Mr. Crocker's brows raised incredulously.

"But your partner must have put in very much more then!"

"Only about seventy-five more," denied Stick.

"You mean to tell me you've been doing busi-

ness here on a capital of something under four hundred dollars?" exclaimed Mr. Crocker. "Astounding! Ridiculous!"

"It was all we had," replied Stick defensively.

"H'm. Well, you won't have so much to lose, anyway," said the other cheerfully. "That's fortunate, eh?"

"A hundred and twenty-five's a lot more than I want to lose," answered Stick earnestly. "If you hear of any one who will pay that much, sir, I wish you'd let me know."

"I will, certainly. In fact, Mr. Patterson, I'll make inquiries. Perhaps, though, we'd better keep this to ourselves for the present. For instance, I wouldn't mention it to your partner just yet. Time enough when we have a buyer, eh? For that matter, maybe it'll be just as well if Mr. Emerson doesn't learn of my call. Between you and me, Mr. Patterson, he seems to have taken a—er—well, a dislike to me." Mr. Crocker smiled patiently and forgivingly. "He might, you see, object to losing your interest, which, doubtless, he hopes to acquire himself when he is quite ready. Perhaps he figures that by spring, say, the business will be so run down that your interest can be purchased for less than you'd be willing to let it go for now." Mr. Crocker shook his head sadly, in the manner of one who, during a blameless life, has watched the devious ways of less upright persons. "Well, I'll be going," he continued. "Very

glad to have met you, Mr. Patterson, and to have had this talk. It is always a pleasure to meet a reasonable and sensible person. Good afternoon."

After the caller had gone Stick had one or two qualms of doubt. Had he done right in letting Mr. Crocker so far into the secrets of the business? Would it be fair to sell out his interest to any one save his partner? Still, if Rus couldn't buy, and another could—

Stick had plenty of food for thought during the rest of the day.

Russell watched the Mount Millard game from a comfortable seat in the grandstand and heroically joined his voice to the voices of some three hundred and seventy-five others during four hectic periods. For neighbors he had Stanley Hassell and Bob Coolidge, those young gentlemen having spied Russell making an eleventh-hour search for a seat, hailed him and in some mysterious manner wedged him in between them. No matter how much difficulty Bob Coolidge might experience in ordinary conversation, when it came to cheering he was all there. There was no hesitation, no stuttering, and his voice was like unto the voice of the Bull of Bashan. But had every Altonian there that afternoon possessed Bob's vocal powers it is doubtful if the outcome of the game would have been much different.

Russell saw the enemy hold the home team

scoreless throughout the first quarter, when, with the wind in her favor and all the luck of the game with her, the Gray-and-Gold struggled valiantly and desperately to cross the enemy's goal-line and, twice reaching the fifteen yards, was halted and turned back. It was in that period that Alton played her best game, although the fact wasn't known then. In the second quarter, with the wind behind her, Mount Millard punted and kept on punting until, near the end, her chance came. Then Crocker, who seemed to have definitely won the left end position from Rhame, shooting around the opposite end of the Alton line with the ball, was met head-on by a watchful enemy back and in the shock of that collision let go of the pigskin. When the whistle again piped the pigskin lay twelve yards nearer the Alton goal and a Mount Millard lineman sprawled protectingly above it. That was the enemy's opportunity, for the line-up was on Alton's thirty-two yards and the brisk wind was blowing straight toward the Alton goal-posts. Mount Millard tried two rushes that added four yards more to her possession and then, amidst a deep silence, sent her left halfback to kicking position for the third consecutive time. This time, as friend and foe alike knew, there was no pretense about it. A minute later the ball had sailed lazily across the bar and Mount Millard had scored.

But three points seemed as yet nothing to

worry about. Stanley Hassell predicted that after Johnny had got through reading the riot act in there—nodding backward toward the gymnasium—the home team would come back and bite large and gory holes in Mount Millard. Bob Coolidge agreed thoroughly if stutteringly and only Russell remained pessimistic. Russell had noted the first team's let-up in that second period, had seen the signs before and interpreted them correctly as subsequent events proved. Alton never again during the remaining twenty-four minutes of actual playing time showed herself dangerous. The third quarter was all Mount Millard, even if she didn't score. For Alton, who had taken a leaf from her opponent's book and was kicking on second down, Jimmy Austen performed creditably enough, but what he managed to gain on his punts the enemy stole away by running back the ball for ten, fifteen, occasionally twenty yards. The Alton ends were heavy-footed and slow, tackled the wrong man and, when they had picked the right one, generally missed him. Rhame went in for Crocker and Lake for McLeod, but little improvement resulted. In the line Alton at times seemed half asleep. The men charged high and slow, and on defense it was only the secondary army that saved the day a dozen times. Mount Millard paved the way for a touchdown in the final minutes of the third quarter and secured it soon after the last period had begun. Then a short forward-

pass took the ball to the Gray-and-Gold's twenty-seven yards, a long-legged halfback skirted Lake for six and Mount Millard formed for a try-at-goal. None expected it and it didn't materialize, but again Mount Millard edged closer, this time by a full-back sprint. The enemy made it first down on Alton's sixteen, and from there, although Coach Cade threw in almost a new line from end to end, took the ball over in four plays, the last of which went for three yards through an utterly demoralized defense.

Mount Millard kicked the goal and made the score 10 to 0, and then set to work to further humiliate the opponent. And she would have done so, there is no doubt, if the last trump hadn't brought the game to an end just when it did. For Mount Millard was again well inside Alton's last defenses and coming hard.

Bob Coolidge remarked sadly as they made their way down the aisle that, anyway, ten to nothing wasn't as bad as nineteen to nothing, which had been the score of last year's win for the visitor. But neither he nor his hearers appeared to derive much comfort from the thought!

## CHAPTER XVIII

### NOT IN THE GAME

Sunday morning at school is always a time of reckoning. On Saturday events are likely to succeed each other too swiftly to give one time for reflection or realization, and when bedtime comes sleep arrives quickly to a tired body. But Sunday is different. There is that added half-hour of slumber, the later and more leisurely breakfast at which one eats a little more heartily than on weekday mornings, the following period of repletion and calm, and, subsequently, a long day interrupted by few duties. Under such circumstances even the least thoughtful are given to thought, even to introspection. Yesterday's events, the events of the week, present themselves to the mind, pleasurably or otherwise, insisting on consideration. Even consciences have been known to stir on Sunday morning!

This particular day of reckoning brought one realization to each and every fellow at Alton, which was that the football situation was desperate. Some phrased it one way, some another, but that was what they meant. The team was variously described as "punk," "shot full of holes" and "sunk without trace." Certain mor-

bid youths took to figuring the size of the score that Kenly Hall School would roll up against her helpless opponent. The figures ran all the way from 10 to 0 to 36 to 3. The youth accountable for the latter prediction explained that 3 by stating that even so implacable an enemy as Kenly would let Mart Proctor put over a field-goal under such circumstances, seeing that it was Mart's last game and everything! But there were many who felt that the youth in question was unjustifiably optimistic.

How Coach Cade felt about the situation I don't know. No one did know, probably, unless, possibly, it was Captain Mart. The coach never wore his heart on his sleeve, and his sharp dark eyes saw much more than they told. It was no secret that there was a conference in the coach's room that Sunday night that lasted well after ten o'clock, but those who attended it gave out no news. Rumors, of course, were rife. Mart Proctor had resigned the captaincy after a falling-out with Johnny. Coach Cade had resigned after a row with Captain Proctor. They were going to scrap the first team, all but one or two fellows, and play the second against Oak Grove and Kenly. Hurry calls had been sent to all quarters of the East for assistant coaches. Ned Richards and Mart were at outs because the latter had taken the running of the team away from Ned in the last quarter yesterday. These were some of the wild

rumors that circulated through the school on Sunday and Monday. There were others, but they were less sensational, and so less popular.

On Monday, however, things looked much as usual on the field. There were no cuts allowed, even those who had sustained injuries being out. The hospital list was also in evidence to a man; Neirsinger, with his neck swathed in bandages, Nichols with his left shoulder under leather, Harmon with a right ankle sporting much silk elastic, Smedley looking sad and pale after a ten-day bout with bronchitis; and one or two others. But they were all there, and while a few did no more than look on most of them performed at least some slight labor. There had been a short but earnest talk in the dressing room before practice and the members of the team had worn more serious countenances than usual when they had reached the field.

Contrary to the usual procedure, the second team was called across at half-past four and lined up against a first eleven consisting largely of second-string players. They looked easy to the scrubs, and the latter visioned another jolly massacre, but something went wrong with their vision. With Coach Cade and Captain Mart driving as mercilessly as in a mid-week scrimmage, that patched-up first eleven got together as no first eleven had for a fortnight and gave the scrubs the fight of their lives.

Russell had no difficulty that afternoon in following Coach Gaston's injunction and forgetting that the opponents were Altonians. Butler, who played left tackle in Proctor's place, erased all merciful tendencies from Russell's mind shortly after the first clash when he sent a none too heavily padded elbow against the opposing end's face, an all-encompassing attention that set his head ringing, almost jarred his teeth loose and, proceeding further, put his nose temporarily out of plumb. Of course, it was quite accidental. That is to say, Butler held no personal animosity toward Russell. He would have done the same no matter who had been playing scrub end. Perhaps Russell should have taken that into consideration and felt better about it. But there wasn't much time for judicial consideration of anything, and so, occasionally removing the sanguine evidence with a sleeve, he forgot that Butler was a schoolmate, a neighbor in Upton Hall, a brother member of the Debating Society and a good fellow generally, and, in football parlance, proceeded to "smear" him. So successful was he that Appel soon stopped sending plays at that end—greatly to Wells' chagrin, a chagrin he didn't hesitate to voice—and the two deadly opponents did more glaring than battling. That was a pretty struggle while it lasted, and it was watched enjoyably by non-combatants and approvingly by Coach Gaston. When the trouble began again after the first no-

score period and a five-minute breathing spell it was Mart Proctor who occupied left tackle position on the first and Russell's supremacy was at an end. Not that he allowed Mart to walk over him often, however. Russell played real football that Monday afternoon, and his deeds were respectfully spoken of afterwards. He and the passionate-spoken Wells formed on defense an outer guard that turned back most invasions.

Coach Cade whipped and spurred and the first fought as it hadn't fought for two weeks and more. One by one the substitutes were withdrawn whenever possible and first-string men took their places, and there was a last whirlwind, breathless five minutes that took the ball half the length of the field and landed it under the scrub's goal. There, spurning half-measures, Ned Richards, who had replaced Appel, sought to drive across. A field-goal would have been possible, easily possible from the eighteen-yard line, but a touchdown was still something that the first was incapable of against a team which, like the scrubs, had been fed for a fortnight on victory. Coach Cade stormed and thundered, Captain Mart shouted encouragement, Ned Richards scolded and goaded, and each time the second team gave back grudgingly, growlingly a scant yard or two yards. It was fourth down on the thirteen yards, with five to go, and Ned took matters into his own hands. A fake forward by Linthicum, standing well back

of the line, the ball to Ned instead, a moment of delay and concealment, and then a lightning dash inside tackle on the right. It was Goodwin who stopped the runner barely on the eight yards. There was doubt about the distance and talk of measuring, but the second team captain pushed the hesitant official aside.

"Let 'em have it!" he said hoarsely, defiantly. "Sure, they made it!" He silenced a protest from the red-headed Reilly sharply. "Now let's see 'em get over! Come on, Second! Show 'em who we are! They don't know they're up against the *real* team!" There was insult in that emphasis, and the first growled angrily. But the second laughed proudly and exultantly and lined up inside the eight yards and drew in their breaths deeply. Then came the onslaught once more. Mawson tried to get through Captain Falls and made less than a yard. Moncks tried the other guard position and made nothing. The first snapped into a shift and Linthicum edged back up the field. The second crossed to meet it. Russell went out and back. The ball passed, was gone from sight. A sudden massing of the scrubs at the left of center. A muddy helmet was lifted above the mêlée, was poised there an instant and went back and down. The scrubs pushed in. A whistle blew.

"Fourth down!" panted the referee. "About ten to go!"

First had lost its scant gain!

Second howled raucous derision, taunted as it dug its cleats again. But first team had shot its bolt. A field-goal or a forward pass alone remained to her, and she tried the latter. It was Russell who took that pass five yards behind his goal-line and under the nose of the desperate Crocker, and it was Russell who sank gently down on the sward and, with the ball carefully beneath him, stifled a groan. For the disappointed Crocker had signified his feelings by a quick, hard blow to Russell's already damaged nose.

In the tense excitement of the instant the blow had gone unseen, or unrealized, by most. But Wells had seen it and Wells acted quickly. Billy Crocker measured his length beside the goal-post, while first and second players rushed up, expostulating, threatening, eager for trouble. For the moment none remembered Russell, and that youth presently crawled to his feet with the ball, dabbed ineffectually at his bleeding nose and became aware of the fact that internecine strife was threatening a few yards away. But the coaches and the managers and the captains and one or two other exponents of peace dug their way into the group and begged and commanded and threatened, pushing and shoving here and there, and war was averted. Above all other voices could be heard the strident tones of the indignant and blood-thirsty Wells.

"He poked Emerson square in the nose, the dirty bounder! I saw him do it! Let him come over here and try it on me! Yah, you'd better get him away, Mart!"

Then Coach Cade and one or two more were questioning Russell and Russell was shaking his head negatively. "I'm sure it was an accident," he asserted. "I'm satisfied."

"He's lying!" shouted the irrepressible Wells, struggling between his captors. "He's lying!"

So the scrimmage ended.

Russell didn't go over to the Sign of the Football that afternoon when he left the gymnasium. Jake had rendered first aid to his swollen and extremely painful nose, but Russell didn't quite fancy parading that disfigured feature in public. Stick appeared slightly peeved when he got back to the room, but a glimpse of his friend's countenance seemed to restore his good humor, or so, at any rate, Russell thought. Stick received a brief and bald narrative of the affair, voiced as much sympathy as he ever voiced over the misfortunes of any one but himself and put the matter aside.

"Kincaid was in this afternoon," he announced. Mr. Kincaid was the Physical Instructor. "Wanted prices on a lot of gymnasium stuff; dumb-bells, eight pairs of clubs, a punching-bag —quite a lot of things. I brought the list back. Told him we'd let him know to-morrow."

"But you could have figured the prices easily enough with the catalogue," protested Russell troubledly. "He will think we're a funny bunch if we have to hold a conference before we quote him prices!"

"That's all right, but we've got to remember that Crocker's got everything marked away down, Rus," replied Stick placatingly. "If we want to get this sale we'll have to beat Crocker, I guess."

"Do you think he went to Crocker's, too?"

"I don't know. He didn't go that way when he left the store, but he may have been there first."

"Well, we'll give him the regular prices with the regular discounts," said Russell. "Let's see the list."

Stick produced it and Russell ran his eye down the typewritten memorandum. The list was surprisingly long and represented a very neat profit for the seller. Russell pulled a pad of paper to him and began to figure tentatively, appealing to Stick at intervals when memory failed him. But Stick answered at random and seemed little interested in what, three weeks ago, would have been a stupendous affair. Russell wondered. Had Stick informed him of the conversation on Saturday with Mr. Crocker he might have understood his partner's indifference, but Stick had been very careful to make no mention of that.

After supper, a meal somewhat marred by many

jocular allusions to his nose, Russell hurried to West street, avoiding as much as possible the lighted stretches. Not for several weeks had he been to the store in the evening, and when, expecting to find the premises dark, he saw a dim light burning within, his first feeling was of uneasiness. Nor was his uneasiness lessened when he found the door locked. But once inside he saw that there was no occasion for alarm. Behind the iron grilling of the desk sat Mr. Pulsifer, his startled countenance dimly illumined by the single light.

"Hello," greeted Russell cheerfully. "I didn't expect to find you here, sir, and thought of burglars or something when I saw the light."

"I—I sometimes come here at night," answered the florist hesitantly. "I was—er—looking over my books."

Russell went back of the counter and found the catalogue he had come for, all the time aware that Mr. Pulsifer was following him with a perturbed gaze. Evidently, thought Russell, he was not wanted there, although it was hard to believe that Mr. Pulsifer's occupation was so important as to cause him to resent intrusion. "If," continued Russell to himself, "it was me, I'd be mighty glad to have some one come in to speak to! The old chap looks sort of down on his luck to-night."

When he had said good night and gone out, locking the door behind him, his thoughts con-

tinued with Mr. Pulsifer. "Queer old codger, anyway," he reflected. As a matter of fact, the florist was not really old, but he did give the impression of being so. "Wouldn't be surprised if he went flooey some day and we had to either move or take the whole store. He can't be making any sort of a living. Wonder if he has a family to support. Hope not. They must be starving, for all the money his business brings in. Well, I don't wish him any hard luck, but I'd just as lief have a change of landlord. He sort of gives me the creeps!"

When he got back to the room Stick was gone, but Jimmy was awaiting him. "Thought I'd drop around and ask after the jolly old proboscis," said Jimmy. "How's it feeling?"

"If," replied Russell with dignity, "you are referring to my nose, it is feeling punk. How does it look?" He forgot his dignity and was frankly anxious. Jimmy viewed it from various angles, his head on one side. Finally:

"Strange and—ah—quaint," he answered. "It —it's sort of spread, isn't it?"

"Feels as if it was all over my face," replied Russell, laughing. "Well, Jake says it will return to its usual graceful outlines in a day or two."

"Possibly," murmured Jimmy, "possibly, but I can't conceive it. What have you got there?" he added, nodding at the catalogue.

Russell explained. "You're just the fellow I wanted, too, Jimmy. Sit down over there and give me a hand with this. I'm going to get these prices to Mr. Kincaid to-night."

Jimmy sighed as he took the indicated place and accepted the catalogue from Russell. "I came to tender sympathy," he said, "and remain to toil. All right. What's the first item?"

Twenty minutes later Russell departed for Borden Hall and Mr. Kincaid, and, left to himself, Jimmy settled down on his spine and picked out in the catalogue a great many articles that he meant some day to acquire, a favorite diversion of his in moments of leisure at the store. He knew that catalogue quite thoroughly now, from end to end, but he still found it interesting. He had spent something over a hundred dollars, in imagination, by the time Russell was back, looking very pleased and satisfied.

"Find him?" asked Jimmy, laying the catalogue down.

Russell nodded. "I guess we get the order, too, Jimmy. He didn't say so. Said he would have to consider the prices a bit. But he was awfully nice and said we deserved encouragement and—and all that." Russell thrust his hands in his pockets and beamed down on Jimmy. "There's more than forty dollars of clear profit in that bill of goods!"

"Great! Say, do I get a raise of salary?"

"Yes, if we make that sale you get fifteen cents a week."

"Gosh!" Jimmy was plainly awed. "What'll I ever do with it?"

They talked over the afternoon's events then. "You put up a corking game, Rus," declared the visitor. "I was watching you and Butler, and I'll say that Butler had nothing on you, son. Say, you're playing lots better football than you did last year, aren't you?"

Russell reflected. "Yes, I think I am," he answered. "Steve Gaston's a crackajack coach, Jimmy. He has a way of showing you how to do things that—oh, I don't know, but he just says a couple of words and makes a motion and—and you get him! Yes, I really do think I've improved. Fact is, last year there didn't seem to be any great whatyoucallit—incentive to do very much. You know that yourself. We just went over and let the first team whale us five days a week and that's all there was to it. This year it's lots different. We—"

"I'll say so! This year you just go over and whale the first! Well, I'll acknowledge that you guys have quite a team there. I'll hand it to you. Also to Steve. He's a regular, raging, rampageous tiger these days. Seems as if he'd like to get us all laid up in the hospital and then die happy."

"Steve says the harder we use you fellows the

harder you'll use Kenly," said Russell, grinning.

"Yes, and we're going to use you fellows hard before we get to Kenly," answered Jimmy warmly. "Believe me, Rus, there's some kick in the old team yet, and in a day or two more you guys will be sorry you took advantage of our enfeebled condition—"

"Well, who enfeebled you?" laughed Russell. "It was the little old second that put the skids under you."

"Nothing of the sort," answered Jimmy indignantly. "Look at the hospital list we had!"

"You didn't have any hospital list until we gave you one!"

"Say, you fellows hate yourselves," said Jimmy wearily. "Anyway, you're due for an awful shock pretty quick!"

"Sooner the better," replied the other, cheerfully. "Then we'll know that all our toil hasn't been in vain. I don't mind saying that teaching football to you mutts is pretty hard work, and I'll be glad when it's over." Russell felt tenderly of his nose.

"I guess you'll be looking on to-morrow," said Jimmy, grinning.

"Oh, I don't know. This thing will be a lot better by morning. I wouldn't wonder if I was back on the job again, giving a few more pointers to you fellows."

"Looks to me as if the old pointer was a bit out

of commission," Jimmy laughed. Then: "Say, Rus, I wish Johnny'd swipe you for our team. I don't see why he doesn't. You're as good as that wild ass Crocker. Better, I believe. Or you would be if you were in fast company for a week or so."

"Fast company!" groaned Russell. "Oh, my sainted aunt!"

"That's all right, son. We may be going a little slow just now, but when we go back into high —watch our dust!"

"Watch you *in* the dust, you mean," retorted Russell. "No, thanks, Jimmy, I get all the excitement that's good for me now. And unless you fellows really take a brace in the next week it's going to be a bigger thing to have been on this year's second than on the first!"

"Something in that, too," acknowledged Jimmy ruefully. "Say, what do you take it is the matter with us, anyway?"

Russell shrugged and frowned. "Blessed if I know," he said. "You started out pretty well and went nicely until you struck Hillsport. That seemed to take all the starch out of you."

"That's right: we're sort of rough-dried now. Maybe old Johnny can put the starch back into us, though. I'd hate to finish out here with a licking by Kenly. I wouldn't mind if I had another year."

"I suppose you'll play in the Kenly game," said Russell.

Jimmy nodded. "Bound to for a while. Of course, it's hard luck having fellows like Harmon and Mawson on the same job, but Harmon won't last the game; he plays too hard; and Mawson can't punt much. Oh, yes, you'll doubtless see little James rushed on in the last quarter to pull the game out of the fire."

"I wouldn't mind being in that game," said Russell reflectively.

"Of course you wouldn't! Even if you lose you don't forget that you've been through one of the big hours of your life. Gosh, if something happened and I didn't get in I'd just lie down and die, Rus!"

"And if you do get in you'll probably die just the same, only more painfully! They say that Kenly's got a rip-snorting team this year."

Jimmy shrugged. "They say that every year—until we've licked them. Still, I do think they're rather better than usual. And that's sort of rotten, for we're about half the team we were last year. Between you and me, old son, I guess we're in for a drubbing. It's against orders to say that, or even think it, but it's my honest belief. Oh, well, we'll make 'em work for it! And there'll be some gorgeous and hectic moments before the old Gray-and-Gold is counted out! Besides, ding bust it, you can't always tell, Rus. The under dog has won the battle before this! Well, see you to-morrow."

## CHAPTER XIX

### STICK FINDS A BUYER

The first team worked its way slowly out of the Slough of Despond that week. Progress was not uninterrupted, to be sure, but it seemed certain enough. On Tuesday the first took slight revenge on the scrubs, but on Wednesday it slipped back a little, allowing the second to give a spirited imitation of its former high-handed methods. Thursday again saw the first team in the ascendancy and the scrubs got their first thorough licking in more than three weeks. Perhaps it needed just that to restore the first's confidence, for thereafter, while the season lasted, it never again bowed to its friendly enemy. Russell saw hard work and took hard blows, but lived very fully those days and enjoyed life exceedingly. His comrade on his left, Wells, was wrought to new heights of eloquence daily, eloquence that, as his opponents gathered speed, failed more and more of effect. By the end of that week Wells had fairly exhausted his powers of sarcasm and vituperation and had subsided into an amazed silence that was almost pathetic to observe. He played on, but it was easily seen that his heart was not in it. Battle had lost its savor for the right tackle.

Coach Cade chose to devote Friday to smoothing off the angles in preparation for the Oak Grove Academy contest the next day, and hence the second, its season almost over, was released from work that day. Oak Grove was not ordinarily a hard proposition; had, in fact, been given the date for that reason; but, with the Kenly game a week later, the time had come for a dress rehearsal. Indeed that time, but for the slump, would have arrived a week before. Released from practice, Russell went to the Sign of the Football at three to relieve Stick. He found the latter busy and the counter fairly crowded with customers and friends. Russell had long since discovered that it took, on the average, two and a half boys to conduct a purchase; which is to say that a customer was usually accompanied by from two to three—sometimes four—companions whose duty it was to lend advice and counsel. Russell went to Stick's aid and half an hour later the last purchaser had departed and the store was, for the moment, empty of all save the partners and the ever-present Mr. J. Warren Pulsifer. Stick, free to return to school, lingered, and Russell guessed that he had something on his mind. What it was developed after a few moments of desultory conversation.

"Say," began Stick, "I suppose you don't want to buy me out, Rus."

Russell shook his head slowly. "No, Stick,

That is, I'd be glad to do it, if you wanted me to, but I haven't got enough money. If I took a hundred and twenty-five out of the business I'd be in a hole right off. There's another month's rent coming due pretty soon, and three bills that must be paid by the twentieth. Maybe after the first of the year, though, I could manage it. Still, I don't see why you want to get out, Stick. Things are coming our way at last and we're doing pretty well."

Stick nodded gloomily. "I know," he agreed, "but—but I've got another use for the money." He avoided Russell's gaze, however, and the latter surmised that the statement wasn't exactly truthful. The true explanation was indicated by Stick's next remark. "You think you've got Crocker beaten, Rus, but he's going to get you yet."

"I don't believe so, Stick, honestly. I'm sorry you can't get out if you want to, but I don't believe you'll lose anything by staying in."

Stick looked unimpressed during the short silence that followed. At last: "Well, I've made up my mind," he said a trifle defiantly. "I can't afford to lose that money, Rus. Now, I tell you what I'll do. I'll give you until next Wednesday. Maybe you'll change your mind. Maybe you can get the money somewhere?" Stick's voice ended in a rising inflection.

Russell shook his head. "I can't, Stick. But I

don't understand, I guess. Suppose I don't change my mind by Wednesday. What do you intend to do?"

Stick hesitated. Then, "Sell out," he answered challengingly.

Russell stared. "Sell out! But I tell you I can't— Oh, I see! You mean to some one else." Stick nodded. "I'm afraid you won't find that very easy, Stick. Folks wouldn't consider it a very enticing investment just now." Russell smiled a little at his friend's surprising ignorance, and Stick caught the smile and bristled.

"That's all right," he answered. "Don't you worry. I've found some one who'll buy me out today if I'll sell. I just thought I ought to give you first chance." Something in Russell's expression caused him to add hastily: "I've got a right to sell, haven't I?"

"Yes, I suppose you have," replied Russell quietly. "At least, I guess the law would say so, but it seems to me that, in a partnership like this, selling out to a third person isn't just fair, Stick."

"Why isn't it? I've offered to sell to you—"

"You know I can't buy!"

"That's not my fault! This thing isn't going to make money: it's going on the rocks just as soon as Crocker starts in to really fight you! I want to get out while there's time, and I mean to. If you can't buy my interest I've got a perfect right to sell it to some one else, and I'm going to."

"Who is it, Stick?" asked Russell.

"Fellow named Throgmorton."

"One of our fellows?"

"Sure." Stick nodded vigorously. "He came to see me yesterday, and again to-day. He's going to give me a hundred and fifty for my share in the business. I'll sell to you for a hundred and twenty-five, just what I put in. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

Russell had to acknowledge that it was. "But why does Throgmorton want to buy you out?" he asked perplexedly.

Stick shrugged. Evidently that didn't interest him. "He says the thing's all right. I let him think so."

"But how did he learn that you wanted to sell?"

"I guess he heard it somewhere," answered the other evasively. "Maybe he didn't know it. He didn't say so. He just came to me and asked."

Russell frowned. "Throgmorton," he mused. "I don't believe I know him. Did he say he knew me, Stick?"

"No, I don't believe so. He's all right, though. He's a senior, Rus; a big, dark-looking fellow. You'll know him when you see him. I guess he would make a good partner. He talks like he knew a good deal about business."

"He understands, I suppose, that he isn't buying an equal interest?"

"Oh, sure! He said you and he would get on all right. Said he had this money and wanted to make a little more, and thought this was a good way." Stick laughed. "I let him keep right on thinking so."

Russell shook his head. "I don't understand it," he murmured. "Fellows don't usually have a hundred and fifty dollars lying around loose like that."

"I don't say he's got it in his pocket," replied Stick. "Maybe it's in the bank. But I guess he can get hold of it all right. He talks straight, anyway."

"Well, I wish you wouldn't do this," said Russell pleadingly. "Honest, Stick, we'll make this go if you'll hold on. Why, we've got a lot of business in sight right now. We've got the hockey and basket ball teams, and I wouldn't be surprised if we got the baseball team too. And then there's that stuff for Mr. Kincaid. That's almost certain. And next fall—"

But Stick was shaking his head stubbornly. "That's all right, Rus. You believe all that, maybe, but I don't. I've made up my mind. I'd rather sell out to you, even if I didn't make anything, but if you can't buy, why, I'm going to sell to Throgmorton. You've got until next Wednesday, anyway. I promised him I'd give him his answer then."

"You can give him his answer to-morrow just

as well," said Russell sadly. "Waiting until Wednesday doesn't help me any."

"Well, I'd rather," replied Stick. "I'd feel better about it. You—you think it over, Rus. Well, I'll be getting back. I told Wallace I'd play him some tennis at four. So long!"

Russell didn't have much time to reflect on this new and sudden turn of affairs until closing time, for as Stick went his way two high school fellows entered in search of gymnasium togs, and after that the store was never quite empty of customers.

Between him and Stick the matter was not again mentioned that evening, but after supper Russell made his way across to Lykes and found Jimmy and Stanley in Number 4. It wasn't until Stanley took himself out after a while that Russell confided his perplexities, however. Jimmy took a philosophical view of the situation, although he did refer disparagingly to Stick as a "quitter."

"I don't know this Throgmorton chap," he said, "but I've seen him about and he looks all right. I think Stan has met him. I believe he's rather a shark for study and copped a scholarship last year. After all, he can't trouble you much, can he? I mean, you've got the say about things."

"Y-yes, of course," Russell agreed hesitatingly.

"Besides," went on the other cheeringly, "it ought to be a grand relief to get rid of that crêpe-hanger. Patterson has a conniption fit every time you suggest buying another dollar's worth of

stock or paying a quarter to have the window cleaned. He can think up more reasons for not spending a dime than any fellow I ever saw! If this Throgmorton chap is willing to invest a hundred and fifty in the business he's likely to want to see it succeed. Besides, he's a senior and will have more time to put in at the store than Patterson has."

"Stick's a senior, too," reminded Russell.

"I know, but he's a regular crab when it comes to doing his share. Honest, Rus, I wouldn't be surprised if this turned out to be a stroke of luck."

"Well, maybe," agreed Russell doubtfully. "I guess what worried me most was having some one I don't know for a partner."

"Why don't you go and see him and have a talk?" asked Jimmy. "It wouldn't take long to find out what he's like."

"I don't believe I will," answered the other slowly. "If I didn't like him I couldn't do anything about it. Stick's set on going through with it. Gee, I wish I could buy him out myself!"

"Too bad you can't," said Jimmy sympathetically. "I suppose when Throgmorton takes hold I'll get fired."

"Not unless you want to be," said Russell, smiling.

"Well, I guess there's not much chance of promotion and I'd better give notice and look about for something else," replied Jimmy, grinning.

"I'll help out awhile longer, though. I've really had rather a good time, Rus. I'm sort of sorry dad's so—that is, I'd kind of like to keep a store of some sort. It's fun, Rus."

"You might buy Mr. J. Warren Pulsifer out," suggested Russell with a smile. "I guess he'd be glad to sell to you!"

"Fine idea! Only, you see, he can't sell."

"Can't sell? Why not?"

"Well, it's quite a story, Rus. He confided it to me one morning almost with tears in his eyes. You see—"

"You mean to tell me that Mr. Pulsifer *talked* to you?"

"Of course! Why not? Oh, I see what you mean. Yes, he is inclined to be a bit taciturn, but he will talk if you prod him. We didn't mix much at first, but I treated him kindly and now we're quite thick. Funny old guy, but human underneath. You see, Rus, he's a man with a secret sorrow."

"What's his sorrow?"

"Here's the yarn. It seems that he had an aunt who ran a sort of a florist's establishment in connection with her home. She was fond of flowers and started in selling them to the neighbors. Then other folks came—there wasn't any other florist around then—and so she built a greenhouse and, first thing she knew, had quite a trade. That was quite a while back, though, be-

fore the town was as big as it is. Of course she had competition finally and her business sort of petered out. But she didn't give up. Instead, she died. And when she died she left the place, quite a big piece of ground with a nice house on it, to J. Warren on condition that he continue the business.

"Well, J. Warren, according to what he didn't say, was on his uppers about then. He had married and the old sock was full of nothing much but holes. He had some sort of a job with the railway, he said. So he moved to the auntcestral home—rather good, what?—and turned himself into a florist. But folks didn't come that far any more, for there were other florists in town here, and pretty soon the business was on its last legs. J. Warren was willing enough to let it die, for, as he said, he hated messing around with flowers and didn't know a—a sunflower from a violet when he started. But he had a feeling that he wasn't carrying out the terms of the will, as the lawyer chaps say, without making another struggle. So he opened up this place, stopped raising flowers and bought them instead. By that time he had sold off three or four pieces of the land for house-lots and, I fancy, had plenty of money. This place has never paid. He's lost money every year. He'd like nothing better than quit, but he's got an enlarged conscience, you see, and there's the will and dear old Auntie's dying command! What

he really wants to do is go home and shut himself up in a third-floor room and work on an invention of his; something to do with train signals, as near as I could make out."

"Still, I don't see why he can't sell the business."

"Conscience, dear boy. Auntie wanted him to continue the business. She didn't say for how long, and there's the joker. J. Warren dopes it out that just as long as there's any business to continue it's up to him to continue it. And he plays fair, too. He advertises and tries to keep the thing going. But he's set himself a limit. When the losses reach a certain figure—he didn't tell me what—he will consider that he's done his duty and close up shop. I thought at first, when I saw him figuring and figuring there at that little desk of his, that he was worried about business and was trying to make out whether he could make ends meet. But he wasn't, Rus. He was figuring how much longer he'd have to keep things going. Haven't you ever noticed how he always frowns and looks dejected if some one comes and wants to buy anything? Sure! Every purchase sets him back just so much. Every time there's a funeral he figures that the time when he can shut himself up in that third-floor room is delayed another two or three days. You ought to hear him talk about the doctors in this town! He says they're a lot of 'nincompoops'—whatever

that is—and that the mortality here is disgraceful. And he's as keen as anything for the bill in the legislature that makes Armistice Day a state holiday. J. Warren believes in holidays, lots of 'em. The more holidays the less business, and the less business the sooner the florist establishment of J. Warren Pulsifer gets its death blow and J. Warren grabs a screw-driver and a cold chisel and goes back to inventing!"

"Now," said Russell, laughing, "I know why he was so funny about renting that half of the store to us. One moment he'd be all scowls and the next quite willing!"

"Of course! Auntie pulling one way and the third-floor room another! Well, you see why it isn't possible for me to buy him out and become a florist."

"Well, I'm glad he isn't bothered about money," said Russell. "I was afraid he was getting ready to jump in the river! He didn't say how much longer he expected the business to last, did he?"

"N-no, but I rather gathered that, if all goes well—I should say badly—he will be free of it in about one more year."

"Good," laughed Russell. "Of course, I'm sorry that his business is doing so well, but I'd hate to have to look for new quarters this year. Maybe by next we'll be ready to rent the whole building."

"That's so. You ought to. Say, Rus, I wouldn't be surprised if you could supply the football team next fall. I was telling Tod Tenney about you and the shop the other day. Tod will be manager next year, you know. He was mighty interested and said he didn't see why they couldn't buy their stuff here as well as in New York. Of course, he didn't make any promises, and, I suppose, he would have to consult others about it, but it looks promising."

"That was mighty kind of you," said Russell gratefully. "You've been awfully decent to me, Jimmy, lots of ways, and I want you to know—"

"Can it," said Jimmy.

## CHAPTER XX

### JIMMY HAS A CLEW

It was a rejuvenated team that met Oak Grove Academy the following afternoon. I don't mean that it played faultless football, for it didn't, but it had certainly come back wonderfully, and the School, looking on, marveled and perked up and, toward the end of the game, regained its old confidence and belief. It might have been argued that Oak Grove was, after all, not a very strong opponent, but that argument would have been wasted. Besides, while Oak Grove doubtless did show herself weak in one or two departments, it was still true that she had passed through a successful season, sustaining but one defeat, and that two weeks before she had held Kenly to a 6 to 9 score.

It was the first full-period game of the season, and the sixty minutes of actual playing time was filled with excitement and, from an Alton point of view at least, pleasure. From the third or fourth minute of the contest, when Oak Grove fumbled on her forty yards and watched Putney gobble up the ball and streak down the field for a touchdown, to the last twilighted moments when, her back to her goal, Alton, her line holding many

substitutes, repelled the frenzied attacks of the enemy and finally punted out of danger, the interest never flagged. Jimmy stood eight yards behind the goal-line when he sent the ball corkscrewing away into the gathering gloom, and even as it fell into the anxious hands of the enemy quarter-back the last whistle sounded. The score at the end was 21 to 6.

Ned Richards gained new fame that day, not by spectacular dashes, but by the truly remarkable manner in which he ran the team. There were weak places in the line, there were faults of performance all through, but the generalship was of the best. Ned was steady in his catching of punts, too, and once or twice gained ground for his side, but it was as a commander of men and a strategist that Ned excelled. There were other heroes beside Ned, though none were really outstanding. Perhaps when all is said and done Jimmy deserved as much credit as any other player in the last two periods. He entered the game when the third quarter was a few minutes old and when, with the game secure by an 18 to 3 score, it was thought best to kick rather than rush. Jimmy surprised his audience, perhaps even Jimmy, by the length of his punts and the direction of them. Nothing hurried him or seemed to fluster him. Time and again the ball escaped the upthrust hands of the charging enemy by an apparent miracle. But escape it always did. Jimmy had no kicks blocked.

Harmon, at left half, Browne, at full-back, Nichols, at center, and Rowlandson, at left guard, played top-notch football. Captain Proctor was, as always, good, although to-day he was far from at his best. The Alton ends were not up to the rest of the forwards, and the right of the line, especially after Raleigh had replaced Stimson at guard, was decidedly weak. Tackling was not of the best, the team was penalized far too often and there were times when even Ned's most frantic efforts failed to speed up the players. But the old fight was back again, the old will to win, and that brought victory. And victory brought joy to the School.

Even in the sudden turn from pessimism to cheerfulness, Alton did not, however, swing to the extreme. No one, perhaps, yet looked for a conclusive victory over Kenly Hall next week. Many predicted a tie, some a triumph by a few points—perhaps a goal after touchdown or even a goal from the field. But the main thing was that the Gray-and-Gold had shown that afternoon that, come what might, she was not to be trampled on; that, victor or vanquished, she would uphold the honor of Alton and its proud traditions. So the student body took hope, and high spirits reigned. If Alton was not destined to win, at best the enemy's triumph was to be insignificant. That the School should find reason for rejoicing on so slight an excuse was, when one considered it, strange,

for a preponderance of victories during recent years had endowed Alton with a perhaps excusable arrogance. A more disinterested philosopher than any of our characters might have told himself that a defeat for the Gray-and-Gold would possibly prove an unpalatable but beneficial medicine!

Naturally enough a certain restraint existed between the roommates in Number 27 Upton subsequent to Stick Patterson's ultimatum. In spite of being quite convinced that he was acting within his rights, Stick was uncomfortable and showed it by acting in an unusually care-free and careless manner which fooled neither him nor Russell. On his part, Russell, recognizing his friend's privilege of selling his interest as he had indicated, tried to feel no sense of injury, failed and was unnaturally polite and awkward in Stick's presence. It was a relief to both when either could avail himself of an excuse to get away. Fortunately for Russell football affairs took precedence over all else during the next few days. The Best Second Team in the History of Alton Academy was finishing its career at full steam, and Russell was steaming with it. Monday and Tuesday saw battles royal between the first and the scrub. Wednesday's meeting was less ferocious, since then the second was used as a battering ram and, given the ball time and again on the first team's ten yards, was instructed to carry it over. That success came but once, and then with the aid of

a half-distance penalty, spoke well for the big team's reviving defense. Work was interrupted frequently while coaches explained and corrected, and under such circumstances the old fury of battle was sadly wanting. Thursday, though, contrary to established custom, saw one final, glorious struggle. The second, knowing that it was the last, offered life and limb and fought as never before. More than once Coach Cade was forced to intervene and caution in the interest of his charges and Coach Gaston was obliged, unwillingly it appeared, to echo the remonstrance. That was a fine and fitting finish for the second, for although the first scored a touchdown and kicked a field-goal, the scrub team took the ball away from the enemy on the latter's forty-two yards and, growling and snarling, plunged and twisted, battered and hammered her way across nine almost obliterated white lines and set the pigskin behind the first team's goal. That march was epic. Friendship was forgotten and no mercy was asked nor shown. Behind the retreating, amazed first team line Coach Cade barked passionate entreaties. In the wake of the second Steve Gaston, an unholy light of triumph on his lean face, roared hoarsely.

"Fight! *Fight!* FIGHT!" urged Steve. "Six yards more! You can do it, Second! Take it over! It's your last chance! Don't quit now! Smash them! Smear them! Fight, Second."

To the cries of the coaches were added the panting expostulations, appeals, commands of the quarterbacks and captains and the hoarse clamors of the players. Wells, of the second, had found his old eloquence once more and his voice sounded well above the bedlam. "Yah! Try that again, you mutton-face! Come on, Second! Tear 'em up! Look out, you yellow curs, we're coming through! Yah!"

And then red-headed Reilly was flat on the yellowing sod, his legs in their torn gray hose inside the field but his body in its sweat-stained jacket well over and the pigskin nestled beneath him in a a grip that would have resisted wild horses! No goal was kicked, none attempted. The last scrimmage was over. Friend and foe faced each other, panting, glaring, growling. A hushed moment passed. Then tense faces relaxed. The second swarmed together and beat each other's backs and turned somersaults with the last ounce of remaining strength, shouted with what breath was left in their well-nigh empty lungs, and the first looked on with understanding at least. A few grins made their appearance, gruesome efforts, maybe, on dirt-marked and sometimes battered countenances. Then Captain Proctor, leaning heavily on Rowlandson's big shoulder, lifted a tired voice.

"Regular . . . cheer . . . for the . . . Second . . . fellows! . . . All together! Come on!"

And the second, grouping themselves about

Captain Falls, came back heartily, and their season was over, the duties finished, their rest at hand!

But that was on Thursday, and before it happened other events had occurred which must be set down here. It was Tuesday night that Jimmy appeared hurriedly at Number 27 and, since Stick was seated across the table from Russell, decoyed the latter into the corridor and thence downstairs to a corner of the recreation room.

"Look here," he began when they were seated, "there may not be anything in this, but I thought I'd better tell you. You know that fellow Throgmorton? Well, I've just discovered that he and Billy Crocker are as thick as thieves. I happened to see them together in the village this morning. They went into the drug store across the street. Had drinks, I suppose. Then I asked Stimson this evening at table; he rooms in the same corridor with Throgmorton; and Stimson says those two are great pals. Crocker's at Throgmorton's room half the time."

Russell stared blankly. "You mean—"

"Well, what do you think? Here's this old geezer, Crocker, trying to put you out of business. Patterson gets an offer for his interest from Throgmorton. Throgmorton is young Crocker's pal. Smell a rat?"

Russell nodded. "Still," he said, "I don't see —why, even if Throgmorton bought Stick out—"

"Why, he'd sell to old Crocker again the next minute! Throgmorton doesn't want to buy in for himself. I don't believe he's got any hundred and fifty to his name. Billy Crocker has probably arranged the whole transaction. He picked on Throgmorton because Throgmorton wouldn't arouse suspicion and you wouldn't dream that old man Crocker was behind him. But Billy made the silly mistake of letting me see them together; and that got me thinking."

"I guess you're right," agreed Russell dejectedly. "Although even if Mr. Crocker owns a minority interest he can't do much damage, can he? I've still got the say about things. I don't mean that it would be very pleasant—"

"Wake up, son! How long do you suppose you'd keep on doing business if old Crocker wanted to close you up? He'd find plenty of ways to put the store on the blink. No, sir, it won't do, Rus, and you've got to find some way of fooling 'em."

"You're right, Jimmy. Well, I don't believe that Stick will sell to Throgmorton when I tell him this. He's a pretty decent sort, after all. He will be disappointed—"

Jimmy laughed incredulously. "Why, you silly chump, Stick Patterson does know! At least, I'm pretty sure he does. I'll bet he and old Crocker fixed it up between them."

"Oh, no, I don't believe that," Russell expostu-

lated. "I don't believe Stick has ever even spoken with Mr. Crocker."

Jimmy looked puzzled. "Hasn't spoken to him? Why, how about that time when Crocker was in the store? Saturday before last, wasn't it?"

Russell looked blank. "Saturday? You mean that Mr. Crocker was in our store and talked to Stick? Are you sure?"

"Of course. J. Warren told me. Said the old guy was there half an hour or more talking with Patterson. He couldn't tell what they were talking about, but he said it looked like something important. I thought of course Patterson had told you."

Russell shook his head. "He didn't say a word about it," he replied soberly. He was silent a moment. Then, "I wouldn't have thought it of Stick," he sighed.

"I don't know that I would," said Jimmy. "He doesn't seem quite such a cut-throat as that. But it certainly looks—"

"Yes, I guess he fixed it up with Mr. Crocker. Well, if he did there isn't anything I can do. There's no use asking him not to sell."

"Of course not. Now I've been mulling it over ever since I talked with Stimson. What you want to do is buy out Stick yourself."

"Yes, but I can't. I don't dare take enough

money out of the bank, Jimmy. It would leave me flat, and—"

"Wait a sec! What about Patterson? Will he give you until to-morrow noon, say?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. He said I could have until Wednesday to buy him out. To-morrow's Wednesday, isn't it?"

"Yes, if it doesn't rain. Now listen. Here's a proposition. I haven't worked it out yet, but—Look, Rus! You see Patterson right away and make him agree not to sell until twelve to-morrow. By that time you'll have the money."

"I'll have the money," agreed Russell. "Of course. Some one's going to die and leave it to me, I suppose."

"Shut up! I'll get it for you. Listen, idiot." Jimmy dropped his voice another note, although the nearest person was a small boy half the length of the long room away. "I'll jump the ten-twenty train to-night. That'll get me to New York at twelve-forty. I'll put up at a hotel and be downtown at nine in the morning. Dad always gets to his office at ten past. That'll give me thirty-six minutes to see him and get the nine-forty-six back. That gets here at eleven-thirty-three. I'll take a carriage—"

"Are you crazy?" interrupted Russell.

Jimmy chuckled. "Not a bit. It's a cinch. You stall Patterson off until twelve—"

"But your father isn't going to let you have a hundred and twenty-five dollars for a crazy business like this!"

"Oh, yes, he is. He's a good sort, dad is. I can get a check from him and make that express easy."

"But, Jimmy, you're sick in the head! A hundred and twenty-five dollars is a lot of money. Even if your father happened to have that much to spare right now he wouldn't—"

"Huh?" Jimmy looked surprised. "To spare? Oh, I see." He grinned then. "Rus, you don't happen to know who my dad is, do you?" Russell shook his head. "He's Austen of Austen and Cooper."

"Is he?" asked Russell, unimpressed.

"Oh, gee," laughed Jimmy, "you're no New Yorker, are you? Well, Austen and Cooper are a couple of disgustingly wealthy old men, Rus. That's enough for them. Anyway, dad is pretty sure to be able to dig up a hundred and twenty-five, and he will let me have it, all right, when I tell him what it's for."

"Oh!" said Russell. "But, look here, Jimmy, I couldn't take a loan of that size!"

"Why not? Oh, very well, we won't argue about that. I'll buy Patterson's interest from you as soon as you get it from him. That is if you don't object to me as a partner. Of course I wouldn't be a very active partner after next June, but we

could make some arrangement that would be fair to you. The main thing now is—"

"But have you got permission to go to New York?" interrupted Russell.

Jimmy grinned and shook his head. "Permission? I couldn't get it if I tried, you idiot. And I've no notion of trying. No, what I do is just unostentatiously walk away about half-past nine. No one's going to know anything about it. I'll have to cut chapel and two classes in the morning, but I've been a pretty good boy so far this term and that'll be all right. I'll be around for dinner and no one need know I've been away."

"I don't like it," protested Russell. "Suppose Coach Cade got wind of it?"

Jimmy sobered perceptibly and then shrugged. "Let's not be Glooms," he said, grinning. "Of course there's a slight risk, but the end excuses the means, or whatever the saying is. What time is it now?" He looked at his watch.

"Never you mind what time it is," said Russell firmly. "You're not going to do it, Jimmy. It's corking of you to want to, and all that, and I'm awfully much obliged to you, but you're staying right here."

"Nonsense!"

"Yes, you are! Look here, Jimmy. If Mr. Cade ever found out you know what would happen. You'd be dumped off the team in a minute. No matter if you were the mainstay of it, the only

fellow who could win us a victory over Kenly, you'd go just the same. You know that. You know Johnny Cade well enough. Isn't it so?"

"Possibly, but he isn't going to know."

"Yes, he is."

"How?"

"I shall tell him."

They eyed each other straightly for a moment. Then:

"You mean that?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes."

Jimmy shrugged. "All right. That's that. Only thing left to do is telegraph."

"How about telephoning?"

"No good. I thought of that. This is Tuesday and dad will be in town. I'll send a wire to the office, but I don't believe the money will get here in time. I'll try it, though. I'll ask him to telegraph it. Now let's see." Jimmy crossed to a writing table and brought back a sheet of paper. While he frowned and wrote, erased and rewrote Russell fell into thought. He didn't really believe that Jimmy would get the money, and he sought in his mind for some other way out of the dilemma. He had said that there would be nothing gained by an appeal to Stick, and yet perhaps he was wrong. At least, he would try the appeal. In spite of some faults, Stick had heretofore always acted straight. Russell's cogitations were

interrupted by Jimmy, who thrust the written message in a pocket and got to his feet.

"I'll cut across to the telegraph office and get this off," Jimmy announced. "Come along?"

Russell shook his head. "I guess not. I think I'll have a talk with Stick."

"We-ell, all right. Going to the cheer meeting?"

"Yes, I think so."

"See you in the morning, anyway. Don't forget to get Patterson to hold off until twelve tomorrow; later, if he's willing. And keep your head up, Rus. We'll pull it off all right."

## CHAPTER XXI

### STICK SELLS OUT

STICK PATTERSON was drawing meaningless lines and figures on a sheet of paper when Russell opened the door, and he didn't cease doing it nor relapse from his preoccupied attitude until Russell had drawn his chair nearer the end of the table, from where he could see his companion without having to dodge the lamp, and seated himself. Then Stick looked across gloomily.

"I want to talk about—about this," announced Russell.

Stick returned his level gaze a moment and then tossed the pencil he had held aside and thrust his hands into the pockets of his coat. "So do I," he replied with a tone of relief. "Look here, Rus, I've been thinking about it, and I guess I've been wrong. I don't believe it would be fair to you to sell out to some other chap. You and he might not get on together the way we do. I've decided to stick it out. Maybe later you'll have the money. Anyway, I'll stay with you to the end of the school year, or as long as we hold out. Even if we do bust, maybe we'll save something."

"That's fine, Stick," replied Russell gratefully. "And it's very decent of you. You have a perfect

right to sell, of course, but if you did it would put me out of business, I guess."

"I don't see why, Rus. Anyway, I'm not going—"

"Because Mr. Crocker would see to it, Stick. You don't really believe that he has any idea of keeping both businesses going?"

"What's Crocker got to do with it?" asked Stick.

"A whole lot if he owned your interest."

"But he wouldn't." Stick looked genuinely puzzled. "This fellow Throgmorton—"

"Stick," interrupted Russell, "did Mr. Crocker stop in at the store a week ago last Saturday?"

"What? Why, yes, he did. I didn't say anything about it because—well, he didn't want me to, and—Oh, well, I know I ought to have told you, but he said he thought he might find some one who would buy my interest, and that you'd better not know about it until it was settled. It was sort of low-down, Rus, and I'm sorry."

"Crocker didn't offer to buy himself, then?"

"Crocker? No, he said he wouldn't take it at any price. Of course I wouldn't have sold to him, anyway."

"Then you really thought that Throgmorton wanted your interest for himself?"

Stick stared. "Of course! Didn't he? Look here, you don't mean—"

"He and Billy Crocker, Mr. Crocker's son, are

together a lot," answered Russell. "And Mr. Crocker would like to see our place closed up. I can't prove it, but—"

"You don't need to!" cried Stick angrily. "Of course that was the game! You wait until I see that smart Aleck! I'll—I'll tell him where he gets off! I'll kick him across the Green! I'll—"

"I wouldn't say anything about it," said Russell soothingly. "He only has to deny it. You can't prove anything, Stick."

"That's all right! I don't need to do any proving!" Stick, as has been already intimated, greatly disliked having anything "put over on him." "The fat-head! I thought it was funny, his wanting to buy into the business. Why—" Stick paused and dropped his voice several tones. "I say, Rus, I didn't suspect that for a minute. I wish you'd believe me. I know it looks funny. But honest—"

"That's all right," replied Russell. "I believe you, Stick. I couldn't quite believe that you meant to do anything like that."

"But wasn't I the goop?" muttered Stick incredulously. "Never thought that that old shifty-eyed rascal was trying to pull my leg! He was so thunderingly nice and—and sympathetic! You wait till I see the old fraud! You wait—"

"Never mind that," laughed Russell. "After all, the laugh's on your side, Stick, for you've got them fooled. When you tell Throgmorton you've

changed your mind—hold on, though! How can you get out of it? You gave him your promise, didn't you?"

"I said he could have it if you didn't take it by to-morrow," answered Stick, "but he didn't tell me he was buying to sell again to Crocker! He can chase himself now!"

"Still, a promise is a promise," mused Russell.

"I'll tell him you've bought it. No, I guess that wouldn't do, either." Stick scowled perplexedly. "I'll tell you—"

"It's barely possible I may be able to get the money by twelve to-morrow," Russell cut in. He told about Jimmy's plan and Stick listened impatiently until the end. Then:

"Austen can't have it," he declared vehemently. "No one can have it! I'm going to keep it myself, and we're going to show that old pirate of a Crocker that he can't run us out of business! But I will do this, Rus. I'll take your note now for a hundred and twenty-five dollars and you can have my interest until noon to-morrow. Then we trade back. Here's a piece of paper."

"What shall I write?" asked Russell.

"'One month after date I promise to pay to George Patterson One Hundred and Twenty-five Dollars with interest at six per cent.' Now date it and sign your name."

"But is it legal, Stick?"

"I guess so. It's legal enough for me, anyway.

I've sold out to you and I can tell Throgmorton so without lying. That's all I want."

"I forgot to tell you," said Russell as Stick folded the piece of paper and thrust it into the drawer on his side of the table, "that there's a pretty fair chance of our selling to the football team next fall." He recounted Jimmy's talk with Tod Tenney. "There's nothing certain," he ended, "but I'm going to speak to Mr. Cade some day before he goes away, and—"

"Of course we'll get it!" put in Stick almost impatiently. "We'll work for it until we do! Rus, when we get through with old man Crocker he'll be selling hardware and nothing else, believe me!"

"All right," laughed Russell. "Now do you want to go over to the football mass meeting?"

The next morning appeared Jimmy with a tragic countenance. His father's secretary had wired him that Mr. Austen was in Boston and would not be back until to-morrow. "He says," wailed Jimmy, "that he will bring the matter to father's attention immediately on his return, the crazy galoot, but what good will that do? It wouldn't have hurt him to have used his bean and sent the money!"

Russell soothed him with news of Stick's new attitude, and Jimmy glowed with delight. Then he chuckled. "I'd like to be there when Patterson talks to Throgmorton," he said wistfully.

"Well, there won't be any bloodshed," replied Russell. "Stick usually calms down before the battle begins! And Throgmorton, you tell me, is fairly sizable."

Jimmy grinned. "That's so. I guess Patterson is too wise to start anything he can't finish. Well, I'm awfully glad it's turned out so well. I'm sort of sorry, though, that I'm not to get a finger in the pie after all. I believe you and I, Rus, could have made the Sign of the Football pay real money."

"Yes, Jimmy, I guess we could have, but it's going to pay real money as it is, I think, for Stick's as stubborn as a mule, and now that he's decided to work instead of growl I believe we'll make a success of it."

"Hope so," said Jimmy. "You've got my best wishes, old son, if they'll do you any good. By the way, I'm glad you kept me from making a useless trip to New York last night. Wouldn't I have been sore when I got to the office this morning and found dad wasn't there? Still, I'll bet I'd have dug that money out of some one before I left! Well, so long, Rus. Come over to-night and tell me what happens."

Not very much did happen. Stick kept his engagement with Throgmorton at the latter's room and found Billy Crocker with him. The money was there, too, seven nice new twenties and a ten. There was, too, a very official looking paper await-

ing Stick's signature, and Billy Crocker explained his presence by stating that he was there as a witness. Stick took the money and counted it slowly, prolonging the agony, as he put it later to Russell. Then he laid it down and shook his head.

"Anything wrong with it?" demanded Billy.

"No, it looks all right," replied Stick. "May be counterfeit, but I can't tell."

"Not likely," said Throgmorton, who was a large and rather heavy-mannered youth of nineteen. "Put it in your pocket, Patterson, and sign on the dotted line."

Stick shook his head and smiled gently. "No, I just dropped around to tell you that the deal is off."

"Off!" shouted Billy Crocker. "What do you mean, off?"

"Why, just off; not on," explained Stick patiently. "O, double-F, off. Meaning nothing doing, Crocker."

"Why?" asked Throgmorton darkly.

"Emerson bought," replied Stick.

"That's a lie," cried Billy. "See here, you agreed to sell to us—"

"'Us'?" Stick's brows went up.

"To Throg, here," corrected Billy. "Now you're welching, and—"

"But, my dear fellow," protested Stick, thoroughly enjoying the other's disappointment,

"how can I sell what I haven't got? Be reasonable."

"Oh, shut up!" wailed Billy. "You make me sick!"

"Sorry. Don't see what business it is of yours, though. If you must witness something, Crocker, I'll sign my name on my cuff for you. Well, I must be getting on. By the way, you might try Emerson. Maybe he'll sell to you. Seems to me he ought to be glad to get into partnership with a fine, straightforward man like your father!"

Stick left them staring at him, looking, as he said to Russell, like two sick cat-fish! And that ended that affair for the time and Russell heaved a big sigh of relief. Fortunately he didn't know then that Billy Crocker was quite as averse as was Stick Patterson to having anything put over on him, and that, unlike Stick, he didn't forgive readily.

Thursday saw the end of the season for the second team, as has been told, and Thursday night witnessed the second team's annual banquet in Ford's Restaurant, in the town. Twenty-two battle-scarred but very contented youths ate their fill and sang and cheered and listened to speeches, of which that delivered by Coach Steve Gaston, while the briefest was the best. Steve told them a lot of nice things about their playing and their devotion to the School, and he told them, and with

convincing emphasis, that what he had planned and hoped for had come true, that he was standing at that moment in the presence of the finest second team in the annals of Alton football! At which the roof of the building must have raised an inch before the cheering ceased!

They sang their last song at a quarter past ten and tumbled noisily and hilariously down the stairs to the street and out into the frosty sharpness of a starlit night and swung unhurriedly back to the Academy, very happy and very proud and, now that the excitement was over, deliciously tired. Near the end of the walk Russell found himself beside Steve Gaston. Steve had taken his season's task seriously and, in a way, he had taken the celebration seriously. But now he had relapsed into a smiling and rather silent content, and it was not until they were crossing the Green that he made any lengthy remark. Then:

"Emerson, you certainly worked hard for me—well, for us, for the School. It's hard to be impersonal always. And, for my part, I thank you. I needed you like the very dickens when I dug you out that time, and by making good the way you did you just about saved me. You've got another year, haven't you? I thought so. Well, let me tell you something. You may know it already, but I don't believe you do. Next fall you walk out on the field and tell the coach that you're going to play right end. You'll get it!"

Russell pondered that on his way upstairs. Of course Steve Gaston ought to know, but it did seem to him that the coach had let his judgment slip for once! Further cogitation on the subject was denied him just then, for as soon as he had stepped into Number 27 he knew that something startling had happened. Stick's face was enough. Stick had thrown the door open at the sound of Russell's steps in the corridor and now he was asking excitedly:

"Have you heard about it, Rus?"

"No! What?"

"Some one broke into the store to-night and beat up Mr. Pulsifer! They got him, too. That is, one of him; there were two. I've just come back from there. The police won't tell who the fellow is, but every one says it's Billy Crocker!"

## CHAPTER XXII

### MR. PULSIFER SHAKES HIS HEAD

It was well along toward the middle of the following morning before Russell had learned definitely what had happened at Number 112 West street. Stick's account had been exciting but vague. He had, however, assured Russell that he had personally made an examination of the premises and found everything all right, after learning which Russell had been able to compose himself to slumber with the determination to await philosophically the full explanation of the surprising event. Not that he had sought sleep very early, for Stick, in spite of small knowledge, had had much to say, and his theories had prolonged conversation well toward midnight. In fact, Stick was still theorizing when Russell dropped asleep.

When he did learn the particulars it was from the still agitated lips of Mr. J. Warren Pulsifer. The two met in the police station, whither they had been summoned, and on a bench in the outer room waited to be conducted into the presence of the Chief. Shorn of unnecessary details and repetitions, the facts were these. Mr. Pulsifer had gone to the store after supper last evening and had remained there until nearly ten o'clock. He

had then put out the light, locked the door behind him and reached the corner of Linden street, where the post office is situated. There he annoyingly discovered that he had failed to bring away with him two letters which he had early in the evening prepared for the mail. As it was necessary that they should be delivered in the city early in the morning, he had thereupon retraced his steps, entered the store and, without troubling to light up, groped his way to his desk and found the letters. He had again started toward the front of the store when sounds at the rear had attracted his suspicion. The sounds resembled the straining of a window sash, as though some one was forcing it upward with a jimmy.

Mr. Pulsifer had promptly made his way silently to the window at the left of the rear door. Sounds outside told him that burglars were at work. What his emotions were at the moment Mr. Pulsifer didn't state. It is to his credit, though, that he quickly seized the nearest available weapon, which happened to be a broom reposing in a corner and prepared to repel the marauders. He had barely got into position when the window sash went up and he dimly saw some one swing across the sill. What happened then was still doubtful so far as Mr. Pulsifer's memory was concerned. He recalled raising a loud shout of "*Police!*" and of swinging the broom lustily. He recalled, less distinctly, the crash that resulted

when the broom, evidently missing the intruder, struck the window glass. Then a surprising number of stars shot into his vision and when he next took cognizance of events he was being supported by a policeman, the store was dazzlingly illuminated and a second policeman stood by with a firm grasp on the prisoner.

Mr. Pulsifer had a dreadful headache and a swelling under his right eye, but after being given a drink of water was able to recount what had happened. Fortunately, one of the officers had been crossing the mouth of the alley on State street when the sound of breaking glass had reached him. He had run toward the scene in time to see a figure speeding away in the opposite direction, had shouted to it to stop and was raising his revolver to fire when a second figure had collided with him at the gate of the rear premises. The officer had been obliged to use the butt of his revolver to make his capture, for the prisoner had strongly objected to being detained. Mr. Pulsifer, having been assisted from the floor, observed that the prisoner, who was hardly more than a boy, although a very robust boy, looked extremely pale and that he was holding a handkerchief to the side of his head. Mr. Pulsifer was uncharitable enough to hope that the prisoner's head was aching as much as his was!

After that they had proceeded in a compact body to the station house, accompanied by an ever-

growing body of curious spectators. Inside, the prisoner had, after several hesitations, given his name as William Crocker and his residence as 43 Munroe avenue. Mr. Pulsifer had duly made a charge against the prisoner and then been conveyed in a taxicab to his home.

After some minutes of waiting Russell and his companion were summoned into the Chief's office. The latter did most of the talking. He had, he informed them, got a confession from the boy. What had appeared last evening as an attempt at burglary turned out to be no more than a very silly school-boy prank. Of course, the Chief wasn't excusing young Crocker, but, on the other hand, Mr. Pulsifer of course knew what boys were! The offender was a boy of excellent character, the son of one of Alton's prominent merchants and respected citizens and of a hitherto stainless record. Young Crocker had earnestly disclaimed having intended any theft or damage, and the Chief believed him. Now, then, did Mr. Pulsifer think that any good would be done by prosecuting the charge already made?

Mr. Pulsifer felt of his cheek, blinked a few times and shook his head. The Chief smiled his approbation. Of course, he continued, if Mr. Pulsifer felt that he had a claim for personal injury doubtless that matter could be arranged easily and without publicity. The Chief bore heavily on the last word. Mr. Pulsifer started to feel of his

cheek, thought better of it and again shook his head. The Chief looked relieved and arose from his arm-chair, intimating that the consultation was at an end and implying that Mr. Pulsifer had acted in exactly the way he—the Chief—had expected a gentleman of his wisdom and kindliness to act. It was Russell, who so far had said nothing, who, in a way of speaking, spoiled the finale.

"I'd like to ask," said Russell, "what Crocker intended to do when he got inside the store."

The Chief turned a displeased look on him. "Nothing at all, I understand, nothing at all. They—that is, he had no plan. It was merely a foolish prank, conceived hurriedly and carried out without—er—without reflection."

"There were two of them in it, I think?" asked Russell.

"Two of them? Possibly, possibly." The Chief frowned darkly. "Only one was apprehended, Mr. Emerson. As he refuses to state whether he had an accomp—a companion, that is, we are left in doubt. And since Mr. Pulsifer has decided not to prosecute the matter is of no importance. You are not, I think," added the speaker suggestively, "the lessee of the premises?"

"No, but I sub-rent half the store, and—"

"Nothing has been stolen or damaged?"

"Not so far as I know," acknowledged Russell.

"Of course not! Very well then!" The Chief was once more affable and was herding them toward the door. "Thank you for your visit, Mr. Pulsifer. The matter will be allowed to drop, and so, of course, I trust that neither you nor Mr. Emerson will discuss it with others. I have the boy's promise, and his father's, that nothing of the kind will happen again. Good morning!"

Saying good-by to the florist, Russell hurried back to school and an eleven o'clock recitation. At twelve he mounted to Number 27 and found Stick anxiously awaiting his account of the interview. Russell told what had happened, and Stick snorted. "Ha, that's old man Crocker," he said. "I suppose he's got enough influence to get Billy off if he committed murder! J. Warren's a spineless shrimp, if you ask me. Didn't intend any mischief! Oh, no, not a bit! If J. Warren hadn't been there those two would have put the place on the blink, I'll bet! Maybe they wouldn't have swiped anything: I don't believe they meant to: but they'd have ruined a lot of our stock."

"Do you think the other fellow was Throgmorton, Stick?"

"Sure! Why not? Billy was mad because he couldn't get my share in the business and he made up his mind to get square. Throgmorton's a chunk of cheese, if you ask me, and Billy probably made him think it was just a sort of lark. Well, Crocker got a crack on the head and a couple of

hours in jail, and he ought to be satisfied!" Stick's expression became more mollified. "I guess we might as well be satisfied, too, Rus. The laugh's on our side, all right. Billy's in bad with faculty, you see, and out of football— Gee, that reminds me!"

Stick stepped to the table and rummaged amongst the litter.

"Out of football!" exclaimed Russell. "Gee, that's tough, Stick!"

"Tough?" Stick laughed unfeelingly. "I don't see it. Where the dickens is that— Oh, here it is! That crazy guy Johnson left this a few minutes ago."

Russell took the folded sheet of paper and read the hastily scrawled words amazedly.

"Emerson: Report at training table at twelve-thirty. Hy. Johnson, Mgr."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A MEMBER OF THE TEAM

Afterwards Russell believed that he didn't get his breath again until, at ten o'clock that night, he put the light out and crawled into his bed. Things had happened swiftly after the reading of that note from the first team manager. There had been dinner at the training table in the corner of the dining hall, a dinner of which Russell ate little. His appearance had evoked only few greetings and had been accepted in a surprisingly matter-of-fact fashion. Coach Cade was absent from table and it had been Johnson who had indicated his chair and briefly explained matters, talking across Rowlandson in an aside that probably reached the entire table.

"Crocker's out of the game to-morrow, Emerson," said Johnson, "and we're shy an end. Wouldn't be surprised if you had a shot at the enemy before the game's over."

"I'd be surprised if he didn't," growled Rowlandson, entering without apology into the conversation. "Seen you play, Emerson. You're good. Pass the beets, some one."

"Well, anyway, you be out at two-thirty this afternoon," went on the manager.

"I've got a class at two," said Russell.

"That's all right. They've allowed cuts to-day."

Jimmy came over from the other table where the substitutes sat while Russell was still toying with a large helping of tapioca pudding and sank into the chair at Russell's left, recently vacated by Longstreth. "Hail, hail, the gang's all here!" whispered Jimmy joyously. "Welcome to the Brotherhood of Hard Boiled Eggs, Rus! Say, accept it from yours truly, this is great! When did they nab you? What happened to Crocker? I heard he was out on bail and the old man had shipped him to South America."

The afternoon was a hectic nightmare for Russell. He went through a slow but grueling signal practice with the third squad, conducted about the second team gridiron by Neirsinger, made innumerable mistakes, was scolded bitterly by all hands—who couldn't, it seemed, make allowance for one who, only a few hours ago, had been a complete stranger to first team methods—and passed a very miserable, blundering forty minutes. Followed some throwing and catching with seven other youths, and here Russell regained a measure of his self-respect. Coach Cade had a good word for him as he came back to the bench, and Russell held up his head again. At a quarter to four they went back to the gymnasium and took possession of the floor, driving out a few thin-limbed young gentlemen who had been per-

forming aerial feats on the rings. The doors were locked, benches were dragged noisily from the walls, the big blackboard was pushed out under the light and Mr. Cade, chalk in one hand and pointer in another, began to talk. Russell was pulled onto a bench between Jimmy and Harley McLeod. They seemed anxious to make him feel at home, and he was grateful. The chalk made dots and rings and figures and lines on the board and Mr. Cade's voice went on and on. Russell tried to understand, but he found his mind and gaze wandering. Before him, his broad shoulders rounded as he sat hands between legs, was Paul Nichols, the center. Beside him on the right was Ned Richards, two-thirds his size, his scarred hands clasped behind his tousled head. Harmon, Alton's best half-back in several years, came next. And then Putney and Stimson and Butler. Captain Proctor was at Russell's left, further along the roughly curving row, with Browne, whose big, long legs stretched far under the bench before him. Russell couldn't believe yet that he was really there, that he was one of this silent congregation of the school's elect. A member of the Alton Football Team! Maybe he would wake up presently and find that he was dreaming!

He did wake up, but not with that result. Mr. Cade, noting his wandering glance, had shot a question at him. "Emerson, what's the count on this play?" demanded the coach sharply.

Russell, startled, shook his head miserably. "I —I don't know, sir," he said.

"And you never will if you don't listen! Kindly give me your attention now."

After that Russell managed to concentrate his gaze and his mind and began to understand. Presently they were up, eleven of them, walking slowly through a play. Twice this was done. Then: "All right," said the coach. "Now speed it!" A confused mingling of bodies and a rush half-way down the long floor followed. Then eleven more players went through the same antics, and, finally, eleven more. Then back to the benches, and the coach went on. The shadows deepened under the balcony and the white light from the windows and skylight no longer reflected from the shiny floor. Manager Johnson switched the electricity on. The clock at the end of the hall indicated twenty minutes to six. Mr. Cade tossed down the fragment of chalk and dusted his hands.

"That's all," he said. "Eight o'clock promptly, please."

They filed out and down the stairs to showers and street clothes. At six they began to assemble again at the table for supper. To-night Mr. Cade was in his place at the end of the board and conversation was general and cheerful and laughter frequent. Some of the sixteen fellows who lined both sides of the long table didn't laugh; some scarcely talked; and Russell was of the latter

number. He was feeling strangely apprehensive. To-morrow he might—indeed, if he was to believe some, undoubtedly would—be called on to play against Kenly Hall, and the realization was decidedly unnerving. Going up against the first team was one thing; that held no terrors; but facing the school enemy, the redoubtable wearers of the Cherry-and-Black, gave him a sort of sick feeling in his stomach. There were periods when he longed for his erstwhile obscurity with all his heart!

There was an hour or longer of respite after supper, but it didn't help Russell much to regain his courage and peace of mind. The school talked football incessantly. No other subject was for the moment acknowledged to exist. Long before it was time for him to accompany Jimmy to the gymnasium the fellows were flocking to the Assembly Hall for the final cheer meeting. Football songs sounded on all sides. Fellows who couldn't sing them, whistled. They just wouldn't let you forget for a minute, thought Russell resentfully.

Back in the gymnasium, Mr. Cade and the blackboard came again into action, but now there was a veritable "quiz," and the players were called on to answer questions that, as it seemed to the new member of the team, might have floored the inventor of football himself! Signal practice once more followed, several plays were again run through and then "Johnny" put aside his peda-

gogic manner, pushed the blackboard aside and talked to them very quietly for ten minutes during which time a dropping pin would have caused a stampede of alarm. What he said doesn't matter. Coaches all say pretty much the same thing all over this broad land on the eve of the big battle. But "Johnny" got it across, and grave faces looked back at him and told him things that tongues couldn't have put in words. And then there was a sudden silence broken at last by Captain Mart.

"Three cheers for Mr. Cade, fellows!" cried Mart passionately. "Come on! *Come on!*" Then there was a cheer for Alton, and they went out rather silently and sought their rooms. Overhead a star-pricked sky promised a fair day for the supreme test. Russell fell asleep at last just after midnight had sounded.

Russell was not late for chapel the next morning only because Stick, in spite of all protests and pleas, pulled him bodily from bed. The bell was ringing as they went tumbling down the stairs and they reached the goal just as the final stroke sounded. Doctor McPherson, as was his yearly custom, added to the prayer an intercession for the football team. "For those of us who do contend this day in manly sport we pray thy countenance. If in thy sight they be deserving, give them, O Lord, strength of soul and of body that they may attain their goal."

Breakfast was a melancholy meal, for under the

pretense of merriment and nonchalance lay dubiety and dread. To Russell it seemed that he had awakened to a Roman holiday for which he was cast in the rôle of the Christian Martyr. After breakfast, with a long two hours ahead of them, he and Jimmy walked over to the Sign of the Football. Stick was already busy, for trade was brisk to-day, and promised to be brisker. The counter was fairly piled with pennants of Alton and Kenly colors, with small gray-and-gold megaphones and with arm-bands of the rival hues. Russell took his place behind the counter with his partner and managed to forget for a short time the impending fate. But after he had made the wrong change twice he decided to let Stick manage alone. Jimmy had gone to the back of the store where Mr. J. Warren Pulsifer seemed unusually busy and unusually cheerful. Out on the street again, Jimmy chuckled and, in reply to Russell's unspoken question, said:

"Well, J. Warren's got his release, and the old boy's as happy as a lark!"

"His release?" echoed the other.

"Yes, he's going out of business, Rus. Packing up right now. Monday you'll have the place to yourself."

"But, how—why—"

"That's what I wanted to know," chuckled Jimmy. "Well, J. Warren says that what happened Thursday night settled it. Says he thought it all over carefully and decided that Aunt Mary

—or whatever her name was—wouldn't want him to continue the business after it had become dangerous. Aunt Mary, he says, was very tender-hearted, and he knows that she wouldn't approve of his getting beaten up merely to keep to the terms of the will. It sounds sort of weak to me, but he's perfectly satisfied with his reasoning, and he's the doctor! Funny, isn't it?"

Russell laughed for the first time that day. "Funny? I should say so!" Then he sobered suddenly. "Look here, though, Jimmy, that puts the whole place on us! What about the rent?"

"Well, J. Warren's lease isn't up until the first of the year, so you fellows will have six weeks, nearly, to look around. But if it was me, I'd take the whole premises, Rus."

Russell was thoughtfully silent for several minutes. Then he nodded resolutely. "That's what we'll do, Jimmy," he declared. "Something tells me that the Sign of the Football is going to be a success. Of course, it will mean nearly twice as much rent, and we'll have to sign a lease for a whole year, but—still—"

"Nothing venture, nothing have," said Jimmy gayly. "The store's going to be a winner, Rus. Accept that from yours truly. You've tied the can to old Crocker, and he won't trouble you again, I'll bet. From now on you'll have clear sailing, old son. Such is the prediction of James W. Austen. The W, Rus, stands for Wisdom!"

## CHAPTER XXIV

### "WE'VE WON!"

For nearly an hour Russell had sat, blanketed, tense of nerves, on the narrow bench on the Alton side of the field and watched the fortunes of battle. There had been no scoring. Twice Kenly's red-stockinged warriors had threatened the home team's goal, once trying a drop-kick from an almost hopeless distance and once piling up on the twenty-three yards for three downs and no gain and then hurling a hit-or-miss forward pass that, fortunately for the defenders, had missed! Once Alton had rushed as far as Kenly's eighteen yards where an off-side play had spoiled her chance of scoring. A desperate fake kick, with Harmon taking the pigskin around left end, had lost the ball on the nineteen. For the rest of the time the two teams had edged back and forth across the almost obliterated fifty-yard line, rushing, passing, punting, playing somewhat ragged football to be sure, but playing it very desperately.

Now the Gray-and-Gold was back in the gymnasium, sore and battle-scarred; weary, too, but not knowing it. And the minutes were ticking away fast toward the second half. Manager Johnson, watch in hand, pale-faced and as nervous as

a wet hen, walked a sentry beat between the door and the benches. Coach Cade had said his say, and he and Captain Proctor and Ned Richards were conferring soberly together.

"Time's about up, Coach!" called Johnson.

The group of three broke up. The coach nodded to the manager and then held up his hand. "Same line-up," he announced, "except Longstreth at right half and Emerson at right end. All right! You know what to do, fellows! Let's get them this time!"

There was a cheer, hoarse, deafening, and then they crowded eagerly about the door, pushing and shoving good-naturedly, laughing, pranking, until, outside, they waited for Mart Proctor to take the lead. Then they trotted back to the gridiron, while the long Alton cheer broke forth from the stand.

Russell, keeping close beside Jimmy, tugged his sleeve. "Jimmy," he asked with dry lips, "Jimmy, did he say me at right end?"

Jimmy turned and laughed at sight of Russell's face. "Yes, you lucky dog! For the love of Pete, don't look like that, Rus! What's the matter?" Jimmy knew, but pretended he didn't. Russell grinned crookedly and wet his lips with his tongue.

"I—I'm scared!" he croaked.

"Fine stuff! Hand it on! I'll be with you pretty soon, son, and we'll show those red-legs how to play football!"

During the first half of the game McLeod had

played left end and Lake right. Harley had showed himself just as much at home on the left of the line as in his accustomed position, but Lake, first substitute, had not equaled him. Lake had been boxed far too often, and, once, when he had missed a tackle almost under Kenly's goal, the Cherry-and-Black's quarter had dodged his way along the side line to the forty yards before he had been pulled down by Richards. Coach Cade had determined to try a new right end for the third quarter. Perhaps when the fourth period began Lake would go back again. Meanwhile new blood might help.

Kenly kicked off and Longstreth captured the short kick and was brought down with no gain. From the twenty-eight yards Alton began her journey. Kenly's line from guard to guard was impregnable. That had been already proved. Her tackles, too, were clever and not easily fooled. In short, gains through the Kenly line were few and far between, and Alton had recourse now to end runs and occasional forward passes. Russell's stage-fright lasted through two plays. Then he forgot to be scared, forgot everything but his overmastering desire to serve and win. After all, this was not greatly different from playing against the first. Those red-legged, red-sleeved opponents seemed no more in earnest than the old opponents and played no more desperately. The big, square-jawed tackle who faced him at times was no more formidable than Mart Proctor

had been. In fact, Russell began to think that Mart was the better of the two, especially after Ned Richards, with a cunningly concealed ball, whizzed inside the big tackle for four yards.

Like the first half, the second proved the teams too evenly weighted and skilled for long gains by either side. Two yards, three, two yards again, and then a punt. Sometimes one or the other managed an end run that brought a larger gain, but neither team made first down by straight rushing until the third quarter was almost done. Then Kenly worked a criss-cross of a pattern as old as the hills and got seven yards through Stimson, placing the pigskin on Alton's thirty-eight. Yet two minutes later the Gray-and-Gold was again in possession and Ned Richards' voice was chanting his shrill signals.

Back and forth across the middle of the field went the ball. Penalties for off-side were many. There were a few for holding. Each team suffered about equally from these. The quarter came finally to an end and the rivals drew away and the ball was taken across the field and deposited close to the forty-five-yard line. Raleigh and Mawson trotted on, then Linthicum. But Lake did not come back. It didn't occur to Russell to give consideration to this fact. The whistle blew again and the lines once more tensed. On the stands the prospect of a no-score game was already a favorite topic of discussion. The teams

were too well matched for anything short of a miracle to break the dead-lock. Alton accepted the likelihood with better grace than Kenly, for Alton, until a few days since, had looked for defeat, and anything short of that was to be accepted with thanksgiving. Kenly, however, knowing of her ancient rival's long-continued slump and realizing her own powers, had come to Alton looking not only for victory but a decisive and glorious one. Of the two forces it was Kenly Hall who saw the time shortening and the game drawing to an inconclusive end with the less satisfaction.

Once, soon after the last period started, Ned Richards brought the Alton stand to its feet with a thirty-yard run that, for one ecstatic moment seemed to spell a touchdown. But he was spilled on Kenly's twenty-four, and, although Alton chanted lustily for a score, two rushes made no headway, a forward-pass grounded and Linthicum's effort at a drop-kick was a sad performance. Coach Cade began on his reserves then, and from that moment new men appeared at short intervals. Jimmy joined soon after the period started, and afterwards came Cravath and Johnston and Smedley and still others.

Russell had long since proved Coach Cade's wisdom. Harley McLeod was no more fleet of foot under kicks than Russell, nor were there more gains at Russell's end of the line than at the other. At tackling Russell showed himself earnest and

certain, and no Kenly back, having caught the booted ball, moved after Russell's arms had clutched him. He was streaked of face, sore of muscles, lame of leg, but gloriously happy.

Kenly was becoming almost hysterical now in her mad efforts to score. Forward-passes that were on the face of them forlorn hopes sailed through the air. Twice the Cherry-and-Black almost made them good, but once Captain Proctor saved the day and once it was Russell who at the last moment shouldered the expectant catcher aside. Alton tried her best to win, but she indulged in no risky plays. To keep the ball and get a back away inside or outside tackle was now her only hope until she could reach a point inside the enemy's thirty yards. Once there, she would try a field-goal. But the backs couldn't get away, at least, not far. Kenly watched Harmon, and subsequently Mawson, as a cat watches a mouse. So, as through the former periods, the ball remained well inside the two thirty-five-yard lines and, so far as scoring was concerned, the game was already evidently at an end.

The time-keeper announced four minutes, then two. The stands were emptying. Kenly, who had risked all on her first-string men until now, began to hurl new warriors into her army. Every other moment the pauses were prolonged by the appearances of hurrying, eager substitutes. The shadows were deepening about the field and over on

the Alton stand the hundreds of voices were singing the spirited pæan that is reserved for victory. The ball was on Alton's forty-six yards and it was the third down. Linthicum took the pass from Richards and hurled himself at right tackle for one scant yard. It was fourth down and five to go now. Jimmy stepped back slowly, held forth his hands. Four times he had punted far and true, but this time it was to be different. Cries of "Hold 'em, Alton!" and cries of "Get through, Kenly! Block this kick!" broke forth hoarsely. Then the lines swayed, were torn into fragments. A Kenly forward hurled himself high in air and met the kicked ball against his helmet. The pigskin bounded back up the field toward the Alton goal. Half a dozen players tried for it and missed. Then, in the blue haze of twilight, the watchers saw a figure detach itself from the mêlée and cut across toward the side line. Shouts of warning, of joy, of despair floated up from the field. The scattered forms there, like hounds on the track of the fox, sped helter-skelter after the fleeing player. Now he was blocked, now he had broken free again! Past midfield he went, heading in again toward the center of the trampled expanse. Friend and foe were about him and his flight seemed ended a dozen times. Yet always, by a sudden turn, a wrenching to left or right, a quick thrust of a straight arm, he managed to break away. Now he was out of the confusion,

the field was trailing astern. He was passing the thirty-five yards under flying feet. Between him and the nearing goal no enemy lurked, for Kenly's quarter had been drawn out of position by the blocked kick. But that quarter was in hot pursuit a half-dozen strides behind. Back of him the rest of the players were strung out for many yards.

The fox faltered once near the twenty, and the nearer hound lessened the intervening space, but a third actor had joined them now. Close to the fifteen yards he made his final desperate effort. Drawing even with the red-legged pursuer, he launched himself sidewise. Together the two went down and rolled over, and the fox ran free! Another white line passed under his feet, and another. Bedlam had broken loose on the Alton stand and that last faint streak was crossed to the wild exultation of victory! And having crossed the line, Russell set the ball down and set himself down beside it. Then he closed his eyes while the nearer goal-post swayed like the mast of a vessel in a heavy sea!

It was Jimmy who reached him first, Jimmy who, panting and exhausted, threw an arm about his shoulders and rubbed streaming eyes against a dirty sleeve. "Oh, Rus!" muttered Jimmy. "Bless your heart, son! We've won! Do you get it, Rus? We've won the old ball game!"

THE END

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